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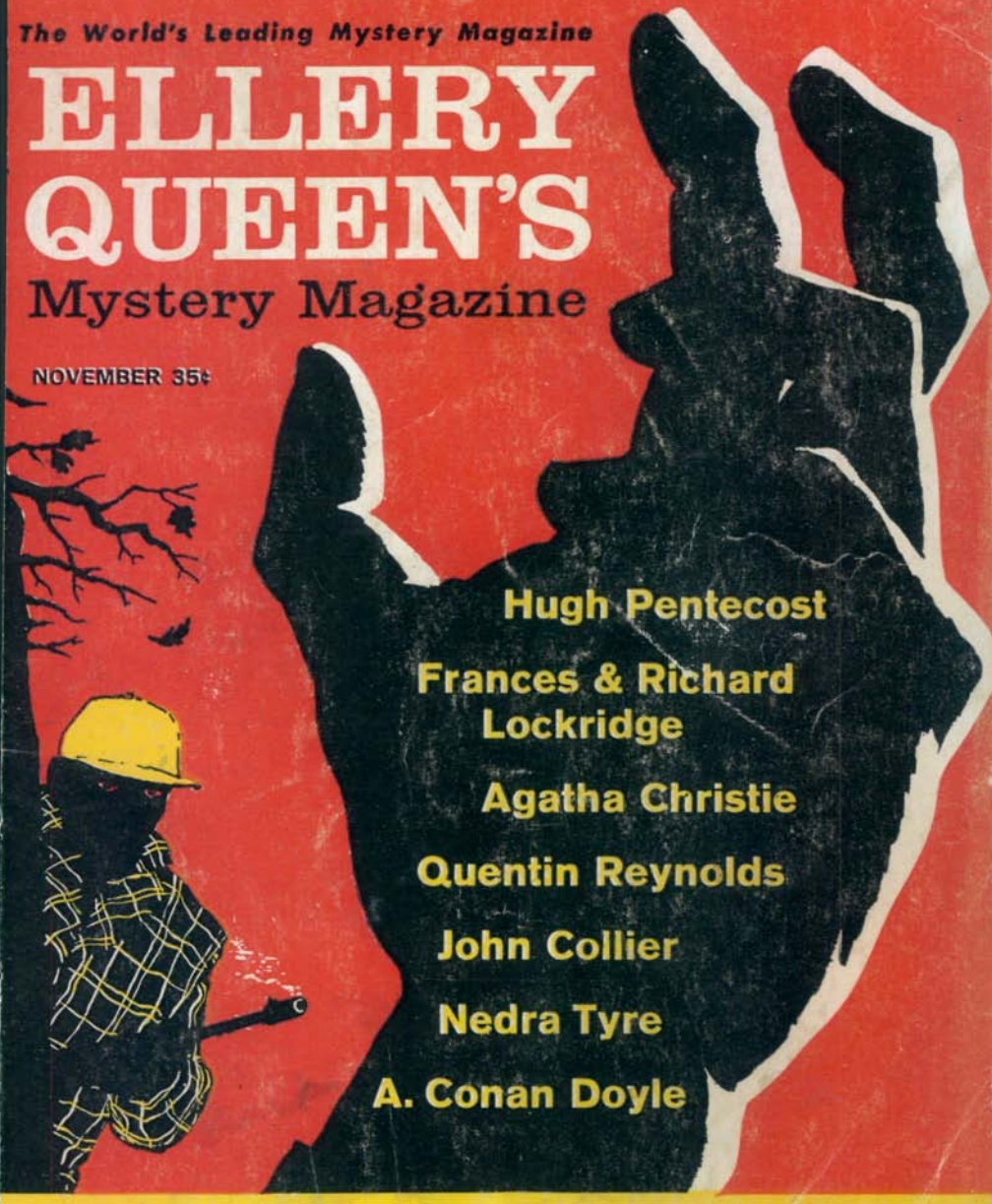

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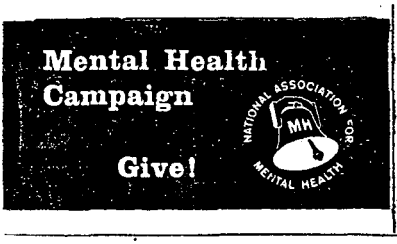

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A NEW DETECTIVE NOVELETTE

The Christmas get-together this year proved to be an overture to murder. The hostess, as usual, was the spinster-librarian, and her guests included the publisher-editor of the county newspaper, the headmaster of the swank boys' school, a disturbingly beautiful model, a blustering athletic hero, a sloppy professor of History—and a sensitive twelve-year-old boy, the son of a famous mountain climber, automobile race driver, and thrill seeker . . . But it was the poet Alexander Pope who long ago foretold this year's tragedy: "Whoe'er it be that tells my faults, I hate him mortally!"

THE LAME DUCK HOUSE PARTY

by HUGH PENTECOST

THE SUPPER PARTY AT ANNE LAWson's just a week before Christmas was actually a prelude to the murder that was to rock Chadwick, both the School and the Village, and make a brief tabloid sensation throughout the East. The odd part of it was that not even the murderer recognized it as such at the time.

The party was an annual event, though the personnel changed somewhat each year. The School was always nearly deserted at that time. Six hundred adolescent boys had gone home to their families for the holiday. The bulk of the faculty had also taken off for the vacation. Left behind were a few families whose permanent homes were in Chadwick, and a few who, for one reason or another, had no place to go. "The lame duck reunion," Anne called her little get-together.

Joy Parker, publisher and editor of the *County Press,* was far from being a lame duck in these days. Seven years ago, freshly and tragically widowed, she had come to Chadwick and bought the sleepy little newspaper that covered all the towns in the county. She had turned it into a first-rate, vigorous country newspaper. She had filled it with controversy and doubled its circulation in two years.

Joy was an attractive thirty-five, and managed to scandalize the conservative females of the community with her daring evening gowns, her almost theatrical skill with make-up, and her constant up-to-the-minuteness in the new styles. "On the make!" was what the ladies said of her. The males, conservative and otherwise, found her delightful. She had a salty wit that never

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reached vulgarity. She dealt with them in business as if she were "one of the boys."

After she had bought a little salt box cottage on the edge of the School campus and settled there to live, the Villagers immediately suspected her of being an intellectual who would wreck "their" paper. The School community thought she was a "climber" trying to worm her way into their own special social world. In the end, both sides discovered that she was hard-working, forthright, unpretentious in spite of her bizarre wardrobe, and a vigorous and sympathetic champion of the underdog. It was this latter quality that was to plunge Joy into the middle of a murder investigation.

Anne Lawson, who was Joy's age but already a confirmed old maid, was the first real friend Joy had made when she came to Chadwick. Anne was the School librarian. Whatever had made Anne hide her physical attractiveness behind severe hairdos, mannish tweeds, and low-heeled brogans was still a mystery to Joy. But Joy had come to realize that Anne's Christmas party had actually been started on her account.

That first Christmas in Chadwick had been Joy's first holiday season without Ben, her husband. It had been a tough time for her. She had already made her mark in the Village and was deluged with invitations; but somehow it seemed impossible to keep up the mask of gaiety and frivolous irresponsibility. Anne had sensed this. Her only family was her sister Celia, and the lovely Celia had gone off to a house party somewhere else.

"Have supper with me and we'll take off our shoes and to hell with the Christmas spirit," Anne had suggested.

Being alone was bad, Joy knew. Being with a lot of people would be worse. So she was grateful for Anne's suggestion and accepted it. Eventually there was a third person present, the son of an Indian Maharajah who was an exchange student at Chadwick, spoke very little English, and was about as far away from home and as miserable as anyone could be. The boy was touchingly grateful for being invited—Anne and Joy felt they had really done something good for someone and Christmas didn't seem so lonely after all.

Thus began "the lame duck house party."

Anne was rather wry about this year's affair. "Sort of fifty-fifty in the lame duck department," she told Joy.

There would be Mr. James Proctor, autocratic headmaster of Chadwick whose social qualities were about as warm as a dead cactus and who had stayed over at School because of some repairs being done on the Observatory which was his own special pet project.

There would be the lovely Celia Lawson, ten years Anne's junior and mothered by Anne, who had been a highly successful model in

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New York. Some mysterious blood infection had hospitalized Celia about a year before, and she had come home to Anne to convalesce. To everyone's surprise she didn't return to her job when she was well again. Perhaps the adulation of six hundred adolescent boys and fifty male faculty members was too intriguing. In any event, she stayed on and had wangled a job as staff photographer from Joy.

There would be Patrick Aloysius O'Flynn, Chadwick's athletic coach, who was Celia's special beau and about as unlame a duck as you could imagine. Patrick Aloysius O'Flynn had had his big day some ten years ago when, playing halfback for a small New England college, he had run through a powerful Navy eleven for four touchdowns. It was reminiscent of the great Red Grange in his heyday. It didn't matter that Navy had finally won the game. The O'Flynn was suddenly a national figure.

It was Jimmy Powers or Red Smith or another of the syndicated sports columnists who had discovered that The O'Flynn kept himself in shape in the summertime by carrying thousands of bricks up hundreds of miles of ladder for a Boston contractor, and had promptly dubbed him "The Boston Hod Carrier." He became Hod O'Flynn, both to his friends and to his enemies. He was a huge, red-headed, loud, opinionated, bullying, kindly, sentimental guy. There was no such word as "defeat" in Hod O'Flynn's vocabulary—not in sports, not in debate,—not in love. Celia was to be his, and damn the torpedoes!

So far, very little in the lame duck department. But, Doctor Samuel Slater, of the history department, would also be present. Here, Joy told herself, was the essence of lame duck. Sloppy Sam, as he was irreverently called by the student body, was the squarest peg that anyone ever tried to fit into a round hole. Chadwick was a school for rich men's sons. Doctor Sam Slater, two minutes after he had put on a brand new suit, looked as if he had just "ridden the rods" through the city of Pittsburgh. He couldn't demonstrate anything on the classroom blackboard without becoming smeared with chalk from head to foot. He was an enthusiast about his subject, history, and would talk endlessly about it, flushed with excitement.

They said it was a trick of the boys in the dining room to get him started on one of his pet themes, and then, while he was deep in talk, have the waitress remove his untouched meal. Later they would ask him how he had enjoyed his dinner, and he would beam at them and say he had found it excellent although he hadn't touched a mouthful.

Boys find such concentration and enthusiasm a source of comedy. He could not keep discipline. He treated adolescents as grownups and for his pains was treated as an adolescent

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himself. Booby traps were planted in his room, his bed was upset, his papers deliberately disordered. Through it all Dr. Sloppy Sam Slater moved blithely, quoting the wisdom of all the ages, laughing at himself, but—and Joy was aware of this—racked by his inadequacies, fighting the childish impulse to tears because he could not be a good fellow, aware that he was clown and aching to be a man.

If you could see a portrait of Dr. Slater, Joy thought, before the first fifteen minutes of the day had completely touseled him, you would have seen an almost strong face, lined by sympathy, tolerance, and good humor. Someone you'd like and trust. But in action Dr. Slater was almost pathetic.

The final guest was someone Joy had never met. He was a twelve-year-old boy named David Bolton. David's father was *the* Max Bolton, mountain climber, automobile race driver, thrill seeker. The great Max was spending the holidays in Italy, preparatory to driving his Jaguar in the international road race, and having his pictures taken with his new bride, the glamorous movie star, Millicent Meredith. David's mother had died some years ago in a mountain-climbing accident.

The great Max had sent David a check for five hundred dollars for a Christmas present with a cheery note suggesting he could "take in a theatre or two" during the holidays. There was no place for David, a shy, introverted boy, to go, so he remained at Chadwick. He couldn't stay in his room in the unheated dormitory, so he was being put up by Anne. It was perhaps the normal process of gravity that had drawn young David Bolton and Dr. Sam Slater together. They were friends—gravely, adultly friends. Two children playing at being grownups. Oh, *very* lame duck, Joy thought.

The first few minutes of the lame duck party were very gay, chiefly because the two lame ducks had not arrived. Dr. Sam Slater was late, and David Bolton was still upstairs in his room.

"I don't think he wants to come down," Anne said. "He and The O'Flynn don't hit it off. Hod's always riding him because David's no good at sports. Not to be good at sports is to insult our Hod Carrier."

"Perhaps he's waiting for his friend, Dr. Slater," Joy said.

"A difficult boy—extremely difficult," James Proctor remarked.

He didn't add that if the great Max Bolton hadn't been a generous contributor to the School Endowment Fund he would have washed his hands of David long since. David, he felt, belonged in a small school for problem children. "Bright," he said. "Very bright—but much too difficult."

"He's a panty-waist!" boomed The O'Flynn. He cocked his head

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to one side as though listening for something. Joy noted this characteristic attitude and wondered if he was waiting to hear the cheering section burst out with "Yay O'Flynn! *O'Flynn! O'FLYNN!*" Well, you couldn't laugh off four touchdowns against Navy in a single game. Or could you?

Celia was draped effectively in a big armchair by the fire, a highball glass in her hand. Her physical vitality seemed to vibrate throughout the room. Joy, who never felt inadequate as a female except in Celia's presence, noticed that both James Proctor and The O'Flynn hardly ever took their eyes off the girl.

"Speaking of panty-waist," she said, her eyes brimming with laughter, "I simply must tell you about our other missing guest before he arrives. It's too good to keep to myself."

"Old Sloppy Sam?" The O'Flynn asked, already amused.

Celia nodded. "Monday, Hod, when you went to Boston for your class reunion, I met Doctor Sam outside the library in the village. He had on that absurd old-fashioned overcoat with the astrakhan collar and that antique black felt hat pulled down over his nose. 'You'll be lonely with The O'Flynn away, Miss Celia,' he said. 'There is an excellent documentary film at the local cinema tonight—a drama of the Clipper Ships of old!' Her imitation of Doctor Sam's timid, nasal gallantry was cruelly accurate. "'I would be most flattered if you would care to attend it with me.'"

"A date, by all that's holy!" The O'Flynn bellowed gleefully.

Celia nodded, laughing. "Clipper Ships are not exactly my dish, but I couldn't resist the prospect of a date with Sloppy Sam. He would, he said, call for me at a quarter to seven, in time to make the first show. He arrived in a taxi—he doesn't own a car. Doesn't know how to drive, he told me. I was nearly suffocated by the smell of some sort of shaving lotion I think he'd bought for the occasion. Anyway, we went straight to see his documentary and when it was over—" Celia began to shake with laughter "—when it was over, he asked me if I would care to join him in an ice cream soda!"

"An ice cream soda!" Even James Proctor was shaken out of his stony dignity.

"An ice cream soda!" Celia repeated. "So help me, he had arranged to have the taxi pick us up at the drug store. And then—" she struggled with her laughter, "—and then, on the way home, he said, 'Would you think me very forward if I—' And, believe it or not, he held my hand!"

"A sex maniac!" O'Flynn proclaimed happily.

"Doubtless damp," James Proctor intoned.

"Very damp," Celia said. "He was, to use his own kind of language, near to swooning with it, I think. And then—"

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"There's more?" O'Flynn demanded. "Oh, the villain!"

"'Would I be forward, Miss Celia,'" Celia imitated, "'to ask if something else worthwhile comes to the cinema during the holidays that you would consider attending with me?'" I—I told him I'd consider it. With which he took off that old black hat with a flourish, bowed very formally, and kissed my fingertips." Celia put down her glass, shaking with laughter. "I—I think, if I'd played my cards right, I could have got a proposal of marriage from him then and there!"

"It was pretty cruel of you to go out with him at all," Anne said, from the kitchen door.

Then the room was shattered by the sound of a high-pitched, screaming voice. "She's a fiend, a terrible, awful fiend!"

Joy and the others turned. A small, pale-blond boy stood in the doorway to the front hall. His fists were clenched and tears were streaming down his face. He stared for a minute at headmaster Proctor, then he pointed his finger at Celia and risked total destruction. "She's a bitch!" he shouted.

The O'Flynn was across the room in three swift bounds. "That will do, Bolton!" he thundered. He took the boy by the scruff of the neck and began to shake him violently.

And then suddenly O'Flynn stopped. He was looking over David Bolton's head to the hall beyond. He let the boy go and took a step back into the room. For a moment there was no sound except the strangled sobbing of the boy.

Then, into the open doorway, stepped a figure. It was a small sandy-haired man, and the expression on his face was a curious mixture of amusement and pain. He wore a black overcoat much too large for him with a heavy astrakhan collar that belonged to the gay nineties. In one shaking hand he held a battered black fedora, in the other a small box of flowers, crumpled now by the violence of his grip. His lips trembled a little, and then spread in a shy smile.

"I think it was Alexander Pope," he said in a voice horribly like Celia's imitation. "Yes, I'm sure it was Alexander Pope who said, 'Whoe'er it be that tells my faults, I hate him mortally!'" He smiled again, as though he had expected an amused response. Then he shook his head as if he were saying to himself, "Why is it that my jokes never come off?"

He looked directly at Celia. "It just seemed an apt quotation," he said. "Of course I don't hate you, Miss Celia. But I must confess I am just a little wounded by what I unfortunately overheard. You see, David was watching for me and so he opened the door. Thus there was no warning of a bell or a knock to appraise you of my coming."

He drew a deep breath. "I think, in the circumstances, it would make things easier for everyone if I sim-

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ply withdrew—much as I had looked forward to the evening. I know you will excuse me, Miss Anne."

He turned slowly, and then as if suddenly he could stand it no longer, he literally ran to the front door and out into the bitter cold night.

"Dr. Sam!" the boy cried after him. "Wait!"

The front door slammed again. No one moved or spoke for a moment. Then Joy Parker crossed briskly to the hall. She turned back to look at Celia.

"You know, Celia, young Master Bolton was quite right about you."

"Where are you going, Joy?" Anne called after her.

"My dear Anne, *something* has to be done about those two," Joy replied.

Behind the wheel of her sports sedan Joy caught up with Doctor Sam and David only a few hundred yards from Anne's house. They were standing in the middle of the icy road, involved in an argument. Doctor Sam had taken off his bulky overcoat and was trying to force it on the boy who had run out of the house without one. They both stepped to the side of the road as the headlights approached. Joy stopped the car and reached across to open the door.

"Get in," she said.

Doctor Sam squinted to see who it was and then said, "Oh."

"Get in," Joy repeated. "We three had a date to have supper together and we're going to have it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Parker," Doctor Sam said, "but I really couldn't go back to—"

"Who said anything about going back? We're going to my house," Joy said. "Get in before you freeze to death. You in the middle, David—you'll keep warmer that way."

Doctor Sam hesitated. "I think—perhaps—well, yes!" he said. "In you go, David."

David got in and sat rigidly beside Joy. Doctor Sam wrestled with his coat, his hat, and the forlorn box of flowers. "I think perhaps I can dispense with these," he said, and started to toss the box away.

"Unless you'd like to give them me," Joy said.

His sad gray eyes suddenly lit up with pleasure. "What a nice idea," he said. "I can think of nothing I should enjoy more."

He struggled into the car, slammed the door on the tail of his coat, reopened it, got everything inside, and slammed it again.

"Mush!" he said, very much to Joy's surprise.

They "mushed" the two miles to Joy's house. Silence seemed the best policy to Joy, but just before they got to the house she felt a little shudder run through David.

"Mr. Proctor will expel me for what I said."

"Mr. Proctor will not expel you for what you said," Joy told him, "unless Mr. Proctor wishes to be

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publicly flayed in my newspaper—which I don't think he does. What you said, David, was to the point, and accurate!"

"A trifle strong, I think," Doctor Sam said. "Just a little harmless fun."

"Harmless my foot!" Joy said.

"History and literature are full of the misadventures of those who, by chance or otherwise, assume the role of eavesdropper," Doctor Sam murmured. "In my case—"

"In your case, Doctor Slater, you got an earful of just the kind of girl our Celia really is. Forewarned is forearmed, to quote someone-or-other. Now, there's the house. As for supper. I have cold lamb. I can make you a salad, coffee, fruit, and cheese. There is wine—milk for David, or coke. And Merry Christmas, you two."

The light from the dash showed a curious glisten in Doctor Sam's eyes as he turned to look at her. "Merry, merry Christmas," he said.

In the house Joy turned up all the lights to make things look as gay as possible. She put on an apron over her evening gown and began getting things out of the refrigerator. She delegated Doctor Sam to carve the lamb, which seemed certain to result in the amputation of his left thumb since he insisted on slicing toward himself. She put Doctor Sam's slightly wilted flowers in a vase at the center of the table.

Doctor Sam seemed able to make a party of things without much effort. David was another story. He did what he was asked to do, but he remained tense and withdrawn. It wasn't until just before supper that Joy understood. The front doorbell rang and when she went to the door she found Anne there, carrying a bulky suitcase.

"I've brought David's things," she said. "He's here, isn't he?"

"Well, yes. But—"

"He can't come back to my house, Joy—surely you see that. You'll take him in for a few days, won't you?"

"Well, I—"

"I'd like to speak to him," Anne said, and walked past Joy and down the hall to the kitchen.

Doctor Sam turned, beaming, from the massacred lamb. His smile faded as he saw Anne. David rose from where he'd been sitting at the kitchen table, and stood at rigid attention.

"There are no proper words with which to apologize, Doctor Sam," Anne said, in her crisp, matter-of-fact voice. "I wouldn't have had such a thing happen to you—or to anyone—in my house."

"My dear Miss Anne—"

"Since there are no words I will have to trust to your instinct to understand how deeply I feel about it. David, I have brought your things here. You are going to stay with Mrs. Parker. I know you wouldn't be happy for an instant under the same roof with Celia."

Joy, watching from the door, sud-

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denly understood. It was the fear of having to go back that had frozen the boy.

"I—I'd have to get permission from Mr. Proctor," he said.

"He's already given his permission," Anne said. "You should be very happy with Joy. She has a wonderful workshop in the basement." Anne turned to Joy, who had suddenly stiffened. The workshop had been set up in this house just as her husband had had it before he died. No one had ever touched one of the tools. She wasn't going to have this strange boy—"David is wonderful with tools," Anne was saying. "I know you'll be happy to have them used, Joy."

"Yes," Joy said softly, suddenly realizing that it was right and proper. "Of course David can use them."

"Good," Anne said. "Well, I must get back to the wreck of my party."

After that everything was fine. David couldn't wait to go down and see the workshop. Joy fought with herself to keep from going along as a protective escort. David came back bubbling with enthusiasm. Doctor Sam ate mightily, asking if Joy minded if he made a sandwich of his lamb. Finally he leaned back in his chair, crumbs and a spot of A-1 Sauce decorating his shirt front.

Joy turned to David, smiling. "Extra desserts for all of your stay here, David, if you'll tell me who it was at the school who nicknamed me 'the gay college widow.'"

David blushed scarlet. "I never heard anyone call you that."

A devious young man, Joy thought. He not only has heard it, but he knows who invented it. And then, as she was about to tease him about it, Doctor Sam began, astonishingly, to sing in a high, off-key whine:

How dear to my heart are the scenes of Ann Arbor,
The ramshackle sidewalks, the one lonesome cop,
The beauties of Dutchtown, the fat colored barber,
And e'en the gay widow I took to the hop,
That tough-hearted widow, that frisky old widow,
That gay college widow I took to the hop.

Joy stared at him. "You!" she said.

"Fred Newton Scott is the author, to be exact," Doctor Sam said. "But I'm guilty of calling you 'the gay college widow,' Mrs. Parker. It was meant warmly and in the spirit of the deepest flattery."

"Oh?"

"I have watched you, my dear Mrs. Parker. I think I know something of your courage—and your problem. I think of you as wise—and kind. Just as that 'gay college widow' was wise—and kind to a lonely boy in a strange world. As applied to you, it was said with what I might call an abstract affection."

"Do you know something, Doctor Sam?"

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"Yes?"

Joy grinned at him. "I have what you might call an abstract affection for you, too."

And that was just three nights before the murder . . .

On Saturdays the *County Press* printed a special weekend supplement. For the Saturday before Christmas, Joy had planned a feature article on the long association between the Village and the School of Chadwick. Celia Lawson had been assigned the job of taking unusual and colorful pictures of the school, looking for historic and anecdotal angles.

At four o'clock on Thursday, as Joy was clearing off her desk preparatory to going home, one of the compositors came into her office.

"No pictures from Miss Lawson," he said. "She promised to have 'em here by three o'clock."

"Damn!" Joy said, and picked up the phone on her desk. She dialed Anne Lawson's number. There was a long ringing before Anne, a little breathless, answered.

"I'm hunting for your baby sister," Joy said drily. "She was due to deliver photographs here over an hour ago."

Anne sounded strange. "We've been looking for her too, Joy."

"We?"

"The O'Flynn and I," Anne said. "He was to pick her up here at two thirty, drive her to your office with the film, and then she and Hod were going to Williamstown to a dance. She hasn't showed up here and we're beginning to get worried."

"Hasn't anyone seen her?"

"She left here right after breakfast. She didn't take her car. She said she was taking pictures on campus for you. Do you know if she had any particular places in mind?"

"She was planning her own picture story," Joy said.

"She didn't come back for lunch, and so far we haven't found anyone who's seen her at all. I haven't been out of the house all day. I've been working on my book." Anne was writing a history of Chadwick in her spare time.

Joy, who since the lame duck party had felt no particular warmth for Celia, refrained from stating that it was just like her to leave everybody hanging in mid-air. "When you see her tell her if we don't have her pictures by five we're going to have to tip out the whole supplement and start over."

"But where can she be?" Anne asked plaintively.

Joy stayed at the office until five, made one more call to Anne's which wasn't answered, and then grimly set about the business of rearranging the supplement. She resented the necessity. She resented being kept late at the office. For the last few days, going home—which she had always dreaded—had been something to look forward to. The

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house wouldn't be empty—young David would be waiting for her. And tonight Doctor Sam was paying his first visit since the Christmas party—he was coming to supper.

Shortly before six Joy started for home, cheerfully damning Celia. It had turned bitter-cold and the stars were obliterated by threatening snow clouds. As she drove along the icy stretch of road that bordered the Chadwick campus she was aware of unusual lights—lights that blinked off and on—flashlights.

Puzzling over this she drove into her own yard and saw that the cottage was dark. Evidently David was not there to greet her, and she felt a pang of disappointment. She garaged her car, went around to the front door, let herself in, and switched on the hall lights. She could see into the living room beyond, and to her surprise young David was sitting in the big armchair by the fireplace. He was lost in some sort of reverie and seemed startled by her appearance.

"David! What on earth are you doing sitting here in the dark?" Joy asked.

"I—I was just thinking," he said.

"Well, think with a few lights on, young man," she said. She couldn't pry into this boy's complexities. "We've got supper to prepare. Doctor Sam's coming, you know."

Out of the corner of her eye she watched him, moving slowly from lamp to lamp, as if there were weights on his feet.

"Have a good day?" she called to him from the kitchen.

"Nothing special," he murmured.

The doorbell rang and she called out to David again. "See who that is, will you, David? If Doctor Sam's come early I'll kill him."

But it wasn't Doctor Sam. It was, surprisingly, Ed Conklin, the town constable.

"Been waiting to see your lights pop on, Mrs. Parker," he said. "Hi son. You're Dave Bolton, I guess. Used to know your old man when he was raising hell around here."

Ed Conklin was a gentle, soft-spoken countryman who had represented the law in the Village for many years. Joy liked him. He knew when to be tough and when to blink at an infraction that would only cause scandal and hurt innocent people if it was revealed. It was said that he had took home and put to bed a hundred drunks for every one he locked up in the Village jail.

"You heard about Celia?" he asked Joy.

"You mean she hasn't turned up yet?"

"Nope."

"Darn fool girl," Joy said. "She could have left a message where she was going."

"We don't think it's that way, Mrs. Parker. We think something's happened to her."

"What could happen to her?"

"Accident, we think," Ed said. "Thought maybe you could help."

"I"?

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"She was on a picture assignment for you, wasn't she? We thought you could tell us what she was taking pictures of. You see, if she fell, or had some other kind of accident —well, there's about a million rooms and closets and basements and lord-knows-what places she could be on this campus, and with the place deserted no one could find her. We're finetooth combin' the place—fire company, civil defense boys, State Troopers—but we haven't come up with a trace of her."

Joy frowned. "She had no specific assignment, Ed. She was on her own. You make this sound serious."

"Is serious," Ed said. "It's getting gosh-awful cold. If she fell somewhere—couldn't make anyone hear her—well, she wouldn't last much longer in this weather."

"Ed!"

Ed Conklin rubbed the gray stubble on his cheek and chin and turned his clear blue eyes on David. "You've been round up here at the School all day, son? You didn't see Miss Celia—any time—any place?"

For the first time Joy was aware of David's almost deathly pallor.

"N-no, sir," David said. "I didn't see her."

"Well, we'll just have to keep hunting, I guess," Ed said. "Oh, by the way, Mrs. Parker. We're short of flashlights. You got a spare or two, maybe?"

"There's a big one in the basement," Joy said. She was right by the cellar door as she spoke and she opened it and started down. Then she heard David call after her, almost desperately.

"I'll get it, Mrs. Parker!"

But she was already at the foot of the stairs. She crossed to the hook by the furnace where the flashlight hung in case of emergencies. She started back. She nodded unconcious approval of the work bench. David was a good kid—he didn't leave things in a mess—all the tools were just where they ought to be.

Then she stopped dead in her tracks. There was a metal trash can beside the work bench. It was filled nearly to the top with bits of wood and metal left over from David's work at the bench. On top of the trash lay a small camera and a roll of exposed film. The camera had been smashed out of shape—almost as if someone had jumped up and down on it. But there was a small metal plate attached to the case that Joy recognized without looking closer.

The words on the plate would read: *Property of The County Press, Chadwick, Connecticut.*

Celia's camera!—the one she had been using on her assignment.

Feeling sick in the pit of her stomach, Joy took the smashed camera and the streamers of exposed film from the trash can. She was vaguely aware of new voices upstirs. The O'Flynn, her subconscious told her, bellowing as usual.

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Slowly Joy climbed the stairs, leaden-footed. Her living room seemed to her like Bedlam. O'Flynn was there, and Anne, and James Proctor—all talking at once, all asking Ed Conklin why he didn't do something. To Joy there was only one real person in the room—a small boy, white as chalk, watching for her as she appeared in the doorway. He saw what she was carrying and Joy had the strange notion that she could almost smell his fear.

"Where did this come from, David?" she asked in a quiet voice.

He opened his mouth and closed it like a beached and dying fish.

Everyone asked at once what it was, what Joy was talking about.

"This is Celia's camera," Joy said softly. "The one she was using today. It was in the trash barrel next to the work bench in the basement."

"Then she's been here!" O'Flynn cried.

Joy looked steadily at the boy. "Has she, David?"

"I—I haven't seen her. I haven't seen her all day," David said quickly.

And Joy suddenly knew he was lying.

Ed Conklin had taken the camera from Joy's nerveless fingers. "Looks like someone busted it on purpose," he said.

"How about that, David?" Joy asked.

The boy drew a deep breath. "I found it outside Edwards Hall," he said. I didn't know it was hers. I thought maybe I could fix it, but —but I couldn't."

"When did you find it?" Ed Conklin asked gently.

"I—I don't know exactly when, sir. This morning, I guess."

"You've had it all that time and you never told anyone?" O'Flynn thundered.

"I didn't know whose it was, sir," David said.

"It says *Property of the County Press* on it," Ed said, still gentle.

"I didn't know it was hers, sir. I thought it was Mrs. Parker's. I thought I'd surprise her by fixing it, if I could. But I couldn't."

Anne Lawson was staring at the boy as if he were some kind of monster. "He's lying!" she whispered.

"You're damn right he's lying!" O'Flynn shouted. He grabbed David by the shoulders and pushed him down into the big armchair. He tilted the lamp shade so that the light beat down on the boy's ashen face. "All right!" O'Flynn said. "Tell us where you found it!"

"I found it outside Edwards Hall," the boy said. "I didn't know it was hers. I thought maybe I could fix it, but I couldn't."

Like a stuck Victrola record, Joy thought. Learned by heart. Not true. Not a word of it.

"You're lying!" O'Flynn yelled. "I'll give you one more chance. *Where did you find it!*"

The boy opened his mouth to

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start his false chant again, but he was interrupted. Someone had come in at the front door.

"Wassail!" cried Doctor Sam Slater cheerfully. "I didn't know it was a party. I come bearing choice viands and aged wines. I trust there is enough. I—" He was in the doorway now, as his voice trailed off and his smile faded. "What is this?" he asked.

"Shut up, Slater!" O'Flynn said. He took David by the shoulders and shook him violently. "I'll give you one more chance!" he said.

Tears rolled slowly down David's cheeks. "I—I found it outside Edwards Hall. I didn't know it was hers. I—"

O'Flynn slapped him hard. "No more of that!" he said.

There was a crash of broken glass as Doctor Sam's aged wines dropped to the floor. He moved with astonishing speed to place himself between O'Flynn and the weeping boy.

"You—you tinhorn Goliath!" Doctor Sam said. "Why don't you p-pick on someone your own size!" And he squinted up at the O'Flynn's enormous height.

That scene was never played out, for the front door opened and a pale-faced State Trooper burst into the room.

"We've found her, Mr. Conklin," he said.

"Where?"

"Kind of a secret basement under the boathouse. She—"

"Sloppy Sam's Sanctuary!" James Proctor burst out.

"Is she all right?" Anne asked the trooper.

The trooper looked as if he were going to be sick. He didn't answer because Doctor Sam was beaming at them all, and particularly at Joy. It was clear to her that in his own futile way he was trying to break tensions. "You didn't know I'd been an undergraduate at Chadwick, did you, Mrs. Parker? Thousands of years ago. Wanted to be a chemist in those days, but they wouldn't let me. So I built my own lab in the basement under the boathouse. Sloppy Sam's Sanctuary, they called it. Everything was fine till I blew a hole in the boathouse floor. Then they sealed it up. Who is it that's there? Snug little place."

"Celia!" Anne whispered. "For God's sake tell me, *is she all right?*"

"She's dead!"

It was David's voice, high-pitched, hysterical. They all turned to him. A pin would have thundered had one dropped on the soft rug. The boy's face was twisted into a mask of horror.

"She wanted to take pictures. I—I took her there. I hated her. When she was looking around the place I —I p-picked up an iron wrecking bar and I hit her with it—and I hit her and hit her until she was dead."

The trooper answered the question in Ed Conklin's quick look. "It was a wrecking bar," he said, his voice unsteady.

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For one dreadful moment Joy thought the O'Flynn would pounce on the boy and kill him. Then the impulse moved another way. The room suddenly began to empty, as everyone headed toward the boathouse.

Joy, unable to take her eyes off David, found her legs simply wouldn't work.

"Bring the boy," Ed Conklin said to the trooper.

The trooper walked over to the chair, took David by the arm, and yanked him to his feet. "Get your coat!" he said.

"Easy, Officer. Easy," Doctor Sam said in a pained voice.

The trooper turned on him, his eyes blazing. "When you've seen what I've seen maybe you won't say 'easy.'"

(*Continued on page 119*)

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

a new story by

AUTHORS: **Frances & Richard LOCKRIDGE**

TITLE: ***Capt. Heimrich Stumbles***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Captain M. L. Heimrich

LOCALE: Van Brunt County, New York

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *"A policeman needs to have a smattering of many kinds of knowledge; he needs such a smattering to detect patterns"—especially the pattern of murder . . .*

THE WIDOW OF PAUL WINTERS stood just inside the door of Captain M. L. Heimrich's office in the Troop K barracks at Hawthorne at a little after two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon late in March. She was a slight woman, with a feather of gray in her dark hair. Her eyes were very wide, very shocked. Heimrich wished he could help her, but had no certainty that he could—or that anybody could.

Paul Winters had died violently some four hours earlier. But Heimrich's concern is with homicide and Winters had died in an automobile accident—an accident that had only involved him. It was simple, uncomplicated; already, the troopers assigned to the case had it wrapped up and filed away. It had nothing to do with the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, New York State Police, and hence nothing to do with Captain M. L. Heimrich.

So there was nothing he could do to help the woman whose dark eyes were so wide, so fixed—the woman who looked so much as if she had been cruelly, physically and, above all, unexpectedly struck in the face.

Ten minutes before she came into his office, Heimrich had been sitting at his desk, involved in other matters. The telephone had rung and he had picked it up and said,

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"Heimrich." He listened, then said, "What's the name again?" since he had not heard the name before. He listened further. Finally he said, "Why, if it's accidental?" But then, after a moment more, he murmured, "All right. That's what we're here for. But let me have the report first. Then the lady."

The report came. He looked at it. A man—name of Winters, Paul—had lost control of his car on a friend's driveway. The car had pitched down a steep slope, hit a low retaining wall, landed upside down in ten feet of water. Tossed in the car, Winters had struck his head on something—the sharp corner of an opened ashtray probably—and so had been unconscious when he drowned. But he would not have been able to escape, in any case, since both doors had jammed when the car crashed.

Winters, presumably, had lost control of his car—as many others had that morning—because he was driving through a blinding snowstorm. Heimrich looked up from the accident report and out of his office window. Snow was still falling, although not so heavily now.

It had been very bad that morning, when Heimrich had driven cautiously down to Hawthorne from Van Brunt Center. "Hazardous driving conditions," his car radio told him, needlessly. It was no great consolation to learn, at the same time, that in Manhattan it was merely raining. It had been merely raining when Paul Winters set out that morning from Manhattan, where he lived, to visit a Mr. Bertram Smith, his partner in business (importing), who had recently bought a riverside house near North Salem.

It was Smith who had reported the accident to the police. The accident had occurred on the steep, twisting driveway down to Smith's house. Winters's car had skidded off into Smith's small lake, made by damming a little river, and it was there that Paul Winters had died.

So—a fatal accident. An accident properly investigated, duly reported on. But Paul Winters's widow insisted on seeing Captain Heimrich.

Heimrich lifted his telephone again and said, "All right. Ask Mrs. Winters to come in, please." Then he stood up, a large and solid man, with very blue eyes in a square face.

Somebody in the anteroom opened the door for Mrs. Paul Winters and she stepped into Heimrich's office and somebody closed the door behind her. She was crying, and did not seem to know that she was crying. When she spoke, her voice was very low—so low that Heimrich had to strain to hear her words.

"I had to see someone," she said. "Someone who—who could tell me. Who *would* tell me. I'd—something I heard about you made me think you would. I don't remem-

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ber who said—" She stopped speaking. Then she whispered, "I can't seem to stop crying." It was as if she spoke to herself.

Heimrich went around the desk and did not touch the slender woman, but he spoke very gently and got her to sit in a wooden chair across from his desk; he did not look at, but saw, her hands twisting a handkerchief. Then Heimrich went back to his own chair and held out a pack of cigarettes toward her. She did not seem to see it.

"Captain Heimrich," she said, "I have to know. Paul—my husband wanted to die, didn't he? I mean—he killed himself. Isn't that true? You don't want to tell me and I—I understand that. You think it wouldn't do any good, wouldn't make any difference. The others—they're just trying to be kind. That's it, isn't it?"

"Killed himself?" Heimrich repeated. "Why do you say that, Mrs. Winters?"

"Then he did," she said, and covered her face with frail hands as her whole body shook. She spoke in so low a tone that, with her hands muffling the sound, Heimrich could not be wholly sure what she said. But then he was sure. "It's my fault," she said, behind the screening hands. "My fault. My—"

"Mrs. Winters," Heimrich said. "Listen to me. There's nothing—nothing at all—to suggest your husband killed himself. Everything to show it was an accident. There were many traffic accidents this morning."

She took her hands down from her face. Her eyes still had the startled look, the look of shocked surprise.

"Mrs. Winters," Heimrich said, speaking very slowly. "I want you to listen to me. There is nothing—*nothing at all*—to suggest that this was anything but an accident. The troopers who went there are good men, trained men. If there had been anything suspicious—"

He stopped. She did not seem to be listening.

"You don't understand," she said, and it was clear she had not been listening to Heimrich, but only to her own thoughts. She spoke toward him, not to him. "It was up to me to see—see that he didn't die. The doctor said that. As good as said that. A few months. That was what the doctor said. A few months—six months perhaps—and Paul would be himself again. He said it was almost always like that when—when the case was simple. As he said Paul's was. What I had to do was see that he didn't die."

She put her hands over her face again and Heimrich waited. "Didn't kill himself," she said. " 'It's up to his friends'—that's what the doctor said. 'Most of all, of course, it's up to you.' To me. *Me*."

Again her body began to shake. There was nothing Heimrich could do about that. He waited, and gradually she grew quieter. She took

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her hands away from her face and looked at him. Her eyes had not changed. "I have to know whether I failed," she said. "Whether I have to live with that. I—*I have to know*."

A policeman needs to have a smattering of many kinds of knowledge; he needs such a smattering to detect patterns.

"Your husband had been in a depression?" Heimrich said. "Had been seeing a psychiatrist?"

She nodded. She was crying again, and paid no attention to the tears on her face.

"And had thoughts of suicide?" Heimrich said, although the answer to that was clear enough. "Had got better under treatment as—I mean, the doctor called it a simple depression?" She nodded her head again. "As usually happens," Heimrich added, "given time."

"And," she said, "protection. Protection from—himself. Do you understand now?"

Heimrich did. A man, almost himself again, not quite himself again, entrusted to tenderness and—watchfulness. The swings between depression and elation shortened, the periods of equilibrium, of normality, growing longer. But—the moments of mind's darkness still occurring. In which— She was, of course, quite right. She might have failed. Failure might have been inevitable, guiltless.

He looked at the slender woman. It would do no good to tell her that.

Because Paul Winters might well have taken this way to kill himself when darkness settled on his mind. There was no point in denying that to the shaken woman. She would have to live with that—live, at the best, with the possibility of that; with a question which could not, Heimrich supposed, ever be answered. At least, he saw no way to answer it.

But she waited—waited for an answer.

"Mr. Winters had been ill for some time?" Heimrich asked, not seeing that the answer to that would lead to any other answer.

He had been. For about a year he had been under psychiatric treatment in a private hospital. Two weeks ago he had been discharged as much improved, ready to try for the adjustment which he would have to make. But released with a proviso—always with a proviso.

"He seemed quite himself," his widow said and now—although Heimrich thought the effort was great for her—she spoke steadily. "Until yesterday."

The day before he had gone to his business office for the first time. And when he came home, she thought he was upset. He denied it, laughing at her gently, saying she must quit worrying about him. He admitted he was a little tired. That was all. Taking hold again after so long a time away was, naturally, tiring. That was all.

"The doctor," she said, "told me

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not to be—to be *too* protective. Not to let him feel that I didn't trust him or was worrying about him too much."

Winters had told his wife that he was driving up the next morning to see Bert. If he could find Bert's new house. "Bertram Smith," she said. "His partner." Heimrich nodded. "He said something about there being a business point or two he wanted to clear up with Bert. I tried to talk him out of it, but he laughed at me. Said he'd already made the date with Bert and—"

Unexpectedly she broke down and her body shook again.

"I had an appointment," she said. "An appointment to have my hair done. *To have my hair done.* So—I let him go alone. For nothing more than that! To have my—" Once more she covered her face with her hands. She moved her head slowly from side to side. Heimrich could only wait. There wasn't anything to say. She steadied herself again, and again it was painful to watch the effort.

"You see now," she said. "I have to know. You do see that? If—if Paul killed himself, if I failed him, I have to know. *One way or the other.* You can live with a thing you know—some way you can—" She paused. "But I have to know."

And saying that, she laid the problem in Heimrich's hands, laid the impossible in his hands. Because there was no way, there never would be any way, of knowing. Accident or intention? The result was the same, and the answer was lost forever in a mind snapped off.

"I'll do what I can," Heimrich heard himself say. "I can't promise anything."

She would wait for him—wait there. No matter how long it would take, "I've nothing else to do," she said. "Nothing to do anywhere."

Heimrich drove north and east. The plows had not yet got to the township road which he turned into beyond North Salem, and when he turned from that onto the private road which served three widely separated houses—one of them Bertram Smith's—the surface was a churned-up mess. Churned up, Heimrich supposed, by policemen who had been there before him—been there when there was possibly something to find out.

The private road, narrow and twisting, had been staked—staked for winter guidance in snow, and left staked into late March, with a pessimism that events had fully justified. The stakes were driven on either side of the road, at intervals of twenty feet or so, and marked the road's course. A little-traveled road can disappear in heavy snow.

The road dead-ended in a turnaround beyond a sign which just protruded above the snow and was lettered "Bertram Smith." Heimrich stopped his car in the turnaround and walked back.

Winters could not, Heimrich

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thought—looking down the driveway—merely have missed the turn. The driveway was staked as the road had been—round, green stakes, dahlia stakes, driven in on both sides and about twenty feet apart. Even driving through heavily falling snow, as Winters had been, he could hardly have failed to see the guiding stakes.

So—he had skidded off the roadway.

Or—he had deliberately turned off it, seeking death.

The drive was rutted. Police cars had crept up and down it; an ambulance had gone down empty and climbed back, not empty.

Heimrich walked down in the ruts to the twist in the drive. He did not expect to find anything the troopers had missed—he did not expect to find anything at all. Even if the car had skidded, even if it had left skid marks, nothing would be proved. A car turned sharply on a slippery surface is likely to skid.

The marks the car had made in snow and earth went straight down to the river. The marks would tell him nothing—they had already told nothing to the troopers, beyond what was obvious. Nevertheless, as he started down the slope toward the battered car—hauled out of the water now, a wreck by the water's edge—Heimrich did not walk in the tracks, but through unmarked snow beside them. If there *was* anything to be discovered, there was no use in trampling it out.

Halfway down, shuffling carefully through the snow, Heimrich stumbled. He flailed the air, seeking balance, not finding it on the slope. Captain Heimrich fell—not quite flat on his face, since he broke his fall with outstretched hands, but flat enough. He swore, got up, brushed himself off. Of all the awkward damn things to do—

He went back to see what he had stumbled over. He squatted down and brushed the snow aside. He had stumbled over the broken end of a green stake which protruded three or four inches from the ground into which—*into which it had been driven.*

Heimrich then sat back on his heels and stared at nothing. After a time he said, just audibly, that he would be damned.

He rose and walked on, very slowly, down the slope, his eyes on the ground. He found what he was looking for—a place where the snow had been disturbed. He squatted again and, carefully, brushed the snow aside. Again he found what he was looking for—a neat, round hole through turf, into clayey earth. This stake had come out clean when it was pulled out, had not broken off as the other stake—the other lying stake—had broken. There would be more holes, without doubt, where the other stakes had been pulled from clinging earth. But they could be looked for later.

Heimrich went back to the drive

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and began to walk down it toward the house—toward the house and a man who had known Paul Winters was driving up that morning, and had wanted Winters dead; toward, it was almost inevitable, a man named Bertram Smith, since who else could have switched the stakes in Smith's front yard and not been caught at it? Switched them to guide a car off an unfamiliar road and to almost certain death. Switched them to kill. Hence, a murderer and one who, murder achieved, had merely to pull up the lying stakes and put them back where they should be—where they must be found later, along the driveway's true edges, telling the truth again.

And by then, a murderer in a hurry—in such a hurry that he had broken one of the stakes he wrenched at and had to leave the three-or-four inch stump in the ground—broken it off so that enough remained above ground to make a policeman, seeking something else, stumble on murder. He would have needed to hurry. The crash of the car against the retaining wall might well have been heard, so the accident had to be reported quickly. There had been also, of course, the need to cover footmarks he had left in the snow as he went from stake to stake, pulling them out. A broom would start that and the thickly falling snow would finish it. Still, there had been a need to work fast—too fast, as it had turned out.

What Paul Winters, on his first visit to his business office in a year, had discovered was anybody's guess. Certainly something Smith could not let go further. Theft of some kind probably. They would have to find out.

There was much that remained to be found out, to be organized, to be proved. There might be difficulties: Smith was clearly an ingenious man—a most ingenious man. But now that they knew what had happened, now that they knew what to look for—

Heimrich stopped going down the drive, stood for a moment, then turned back. Smith—in his house or not—would keep a few minutes longer.

Heimrich went back to his car and used the two-way radio to call the barracks. He could do nothing for Paul Winters now, except catch his murderer. But he might, with what he had to tell her, help an anguished woman go on living, help her pick up the pieces—he could, at any rate, free her from the agony of guilt.

Which was not much; which was something . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***The Affair at the Bungalow***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Miss Marple
LOCALE:	"Riverbury," England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Another mystery from The Tuesday Club —and this one was so baffling that even Miss Marple failed to offer a solution. At least, it looked that way . . .*

"I'VE THOUGHT OF SOMETHING," SAID Jane Helier.

Her beautiful face was lit up with the confident smile of a child expecting approbation. It was a smile such as moved audiences nightly in London, and made the fortunes of photographers.

"It happened," she went on carefully, "to a friend of mine."

Everyone made encouraging but slightly hypocritical noises. Colonel Bantry, Mrs. Bantry, Sir Henry Clithering, Dr. Lloyd, and old Miss Marple were all convinced that Jane's "friend" was Jane herself. She would have been quite incapable of remembering or taking an interest in anything affecting anyone else.

"My friend," went on Jane, "(I won't mention her name) was an actress—a well-known actress."

No one expressed surprise. Sir Henry Clithering thought to himself: "Now I wonder how many sentences it will be before she forgets to keep up the fiction, and says 'I' instead of 'She'?"

"My friend was on tour in the provinces—this was a year or two ago. I suppose I'd better not give the name of the place. It was a riverside town not very far from London. I'll call it—"

She paused, her brows perplexed in thought. The invention of even a simple name appeared to be too much for her. Sir Henry came to the rescue.

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"Shall we call it Riverbury?" he suggested gravely.

"Oh, yes, that would do splendidly. Riverbury, I'll remember that. Well, as I say, my friend was at Riverbury with her company, and a very curious thing happened."

She puckered her brows again.

"It's very difficult," she said plaintively, "to say just what you want. One gets things mixed up and tells the wrong thing first."

"You're doing beautifully," said Dr. Lloyd encouragingly. "Go on."

"Well, this curious thing happened. My friend was sent for to the police station. And she went. It seemed there had been a burglary at a riverside bungalow and they'd arrested a young man, and he told a very odd story. And so they sent for her.

"She'd never been to a police station before, but they were very nice to her—very nice indeed."

"They would be, I'm sure," said Sir Henry.

"The Sergeant—I think it was a Sergeant, or it may have been an Inspector—gave her a chair and explained things, and of course I saw at once that it was some mistake—"

"Aha," thought Sir Henry. "I! Here we are. I thought as much."

"My friend said so," continued Jane, serenely unconscious of her self-betrayal. "She explained she had been rehearsing with her understudy at the hotel and that she'd never even heard of this Mr. Faulkener. And the Sergeant said, 'Miss Hel—' "

She stopped and flushed.

"Miss Helman," suggested Sir Henry with a twinkle.

"Yes—yes, that would do. Thank you. He said, 'Well, Miss Helman, I felt it must be some mistake, knowing that you were stopping at the Bridge Hotel,' and he said would I have any objection to confronting —or was it being confronted? I can't remember."

"It doesn't really matter," said Sir Henry reassuringly.

"Anyway, with the young man. So I said, 'Of course not.' And they brought him and said, 'This is Miss Helier,' and—Oh!" Jane broke off open-mouthed.

"Never mind, my dear," said Miss Marple consolingly. "We were bound to guess, you know. And you haven't given us the name of the place or anything that really matters."

"Well," said Jane, "I did mean to tell it as though it happened to someone else. But it *is* difficult, isn't it? I mean one forgets so."

Everyone assured her that it was very difficult, and soothed and reassured, she went on with her slightly involved narrative.

"He was a nice-looking man—quite a nice-looking man. Young, with reddish hair. His mouth just opened when he saw me. And the Sergeant said, 'Is this the lady?' And he said, 'No, indeed it isn't. What an ass I have been.' And I

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smiled at him and said it didn't matter."

"I can picture the scene," said Sir Henry.

Jane Helier frowned.

"Let me see—how had I better go on?"

"Supposing you tell us what it was all about, dear?" said Miss Marple, so mildly that no one could suspect her of irony. "I mean what the young man's mistake was, and about the burglary."

"Oh, yes," said Jane. "Well, you see, this young man—Leslie Faulkener, his name was—had written a play. He'd written several plays, as a matter of fact, though none of them had ever been taken. And he had sent this particular play to me to read. I didn't know about it, because of course I have hundreds of plays sent to me and I read very few of them myself—only the ones I know something about. Anyway, there it was, and it seems that Mr. Faulkener got a letter from me—only it turned out not to be really from me—you understand—"

She paused anxiously, and they assured her that they understood.

"Saying that I'd read the play and liked it very much and would he come down and talk it over with me. And it gave the address—The Bungalow, Riverbury. So Mr. Faulkener was frightfully pleased and he came down and arrived at this place—The Bungalow. A parlormaid opened the door, and he asked for Miss Helier, and she said Miss Helier was in and expecting him and showed him into the drawing-room, and there a woman came to him. And he accepted her as me as a matter of course—which seems queer because after all he had seen me act and my photographs are very well known, aren't they?"

"Over the length and breadth of England," said Mrs. Bantry promptly. "But there's often a lot of differernce between a photograph and its original, my dear Jane. And there's a great deal of difference between being behind the footlights and off the stage. It's not every actress who stands the test as well as you do, remember."

"Well," said Jane, slightly mollified, "that may be so. Anyway, he described this woman as tall and fair with big blue eyes and very good-looking, so I suppose it must have been near enough. He certainly had no suspicions. She sat down and began talking about his play and said she was anxious to do it. While they were talking, cocktails were brought in and Mr. Faulkener had one as a matter of course.

"Well, that's all he remembers—having this cocktail. When he woke up, or came to himself, or whatever you call it, he was lying out in the road—by the hedge, of course, so that there would be no danger of his being run over. He felt very queer and shaky—so much so that he just got up and staggered along the road not quite knowing where he was going.

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"He said if he'd had his senses about him he'd have gone back to the Bungalow and tried to find out what had happened. But he felt just stupid and amazed and walked along without quite knowing what he was doing. He was just more or less coming to himself when the police arrested him."

"Why did the police arrest him?" asked Dr. Lloyd.

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" said Jane opening her eyes very wide. "How very stupid I am. The burglary."

"You mentioned a burglary—but you didn't say where or what or why," said Mrs. Bantry.

"Well, this bungalow—the one he went to, of course—it wasn't mine at all. It belonged to a man whose name was—"

Again Jane furrowed her brows.

"Do you want me to be godfather again?" asked Sir Henry. "Pseudonyms supplied free of charge. Describe the tenant and I'll do the naming."

"It was taken by a rich city man —a knight."

"Sir Sidney Kane," suggested Sir Henry.

"That will do beautifully. He took it for a lady—she was the wife of an actor, and she was also an actress herself."

"We'll call the actor Claude Leason," said Sir Henry, "and the lady would be known by her stage name, I suppose, so we'll call her Miss Mary Kerr."

"I think you're awfully clever," said Jane. "I don't know how you think of these things so easily. Well, you see this was a sort of week-end cottage for Sir Sidney—did you say Sidney?—and the lady. And, of course, his wife knew nothing about it."

"Which is so often the case," said Sir Henry.

"And he'd given this actress woman a good deal of jewelery including some very fine emeralds."

"Ah!" said Dr. Lloyd. "Now we're getting at it."

"This jewelery was at the bungalow, just locked up in a jewel case. The police said it was very careless —anyone might have taken it."

"You see, Dolly," said Colonel Bantry. "What do I always tell you?"

"Well, in my experience," said Mrs. Bantry, "it's always the people who are so dreadfully careful who lose things. I don't lock mine up in a jewel case—I keep it in a drawer loose, under my stockings. I daresay if—what's her name?—Mary Kerr had done the same, the jewelry would never have been stolen."

"It would," said Jane, "because all the drawers were burst open and the contents strewn about."

"Then they weren't really looking for jewels," said Mrs. Bantry. "They were looking for secret papers. That's what always happens in books."

"I don't know about secret papers," said Jane doubtfully. "I never heard of any."

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"Don't be distracted, Miss Helier," said Colonel Bantry. "Dolly's red-herrings are not to be taken seriously."

"About the burglary," said Sir Henry.

"Yes. Well, the police were rung up by someone who said she was Miss Mary Kerr. She said the bungalow had been burgled and described a young man with red hair who had called there that morning. Her maid had thought there was something odd about him and had refused him admittance, but later they had seen him getting out through a window.

"She described the man so accurately that the police arrested him only an hour later and then he gave his story and showed them the letter from me. And as I told you, they fetched me and when he saw me he said what I told you—that it hadn't been me at all!"

"A very curious story," said Dr. Lloyd. "Did Mr. Faulkener know this Miss Kerr?"

"No, he didn't—or he said he didn't. But I haven't told you the most curious part yet. The police went to the bungalow of course, and they found everything as described—drawers pulled out and jewels gone, but the whole place was empty. It wasn't till some hours later that Mary Kerr came back, and when she did she said she'd never rung them up at all and this was the first she'd heard of it. It seemed that she had had a wire that morning from a manager offering her a most important part and making an appointment, so she had naturally rushed up to town to keep it. When she got there, she found that the whole thing was a hoax. No telegram had ever been sent."

"A common enough ruse to get her out of the way," commented Sir Henry. "What about the servants?"

"The same sort of thing happened there. There was only one, and she was rung up on the telephone—apparently by Mary Kerr, who said she had left a most important thing behind. She directed the maid to bring up a certain handbag which was in her bedroom. She was to catch the first train. The maid did so, of course locking up the house; but when she arrived at Miss Kerr's club, where she had been told to meet her mistress, she waited there in vain."

"H'm," said Sir Henry. "I begin to see. The house was left empty, and to make an entry by one of the windows would present few difficulties, I should imagine. But I don't quite see where Mr. Faulkener comes in. Who did ring up the police, if it wasn't Miss Kerr?"

"That's what nobody knew or ever found out."

"Curious," said Sir Henry. "Did the young man turn out to be genuinely the person he said he was?"

"Oh, yes, that part was all right. He'd even got the letter which was supposed to be written by me. It

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wasn't the least bit like my handwriting—but then, of course, he couldn't be supposed to know that."

"Well, let's state the position clearly," said Sir Henry. "Correct me if I am wrong. The lady and the maid are decoyed from the house. This young man is decoyed down there by means of a bogus letter—color being lent to this last by the fact that you actually are performing at Riverbury that week. The young man is doped, and the police are rung up and have their suspicions directed against him. A burglary actually has taken place. I presume the jewels were taken?"

"Oh, yes."

"Were they ever recovered?"

"No, never. As a matter of fact, Sir Sidney tried to hush things up, but he couldn't manage it, and I rather fancy his wife started divorce proceedings in consequence. Still, I don't really know about that."

"What happened to Mr. Leslie Faulkener?"

"He was released in the end. The police said they hadn't really got enough against him. Don't you think the whole thing was rather odd?"

"Distinctly odd. The first question is whose story to believe? In telling it, Miss Helier, I noticed that you incline towards believing Mr. Faulkener. Have you any reason for doing so beyond your own instinct in the matter?"

"N-no," said Jane unwillingly. "I suppose I haven't. But he was so very nice, and so apologetic for having mistaken anyone else for me, that I feel sure he *must* have been telling the truth."

"I see," said Sir Henry smiling. "But you must admit that he could have invented the story quite easily. He could write the letter purporting to be from you himself. He could also dope himself after successfully committing the burglary. But I confess I don't see where the *point* of all that would be. Easier to enter the house, help himself, and disappear quietly—unless just possibly he was observed by someone in the neighborhood and knew himself to have been observed. Then he might hastily concoct this plan for diverting suspicion from himself and accounting for his presence in the neighborhood."

"Was he well off?" asked Miss Marple.

"I don't think so," said Jane. "No, I believe he was rather hard up."

"The whole thing seems curious," said Dr. Lloyd. "I must confess that if we accept the young man's story as true, it seems to make the case much more difficult. Why should the unknown woman who pretended to be Miss Helier drag this unknown man into the affair? Why should she stage such an elaborate comedy?"

"Tell me, Jane," said Mrs. Bantry. "Did young Faulkener ever come face to face with Mary Kerr at any stage of the proceedings?"

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"I don't quite know," said Jane slowly, as she puzzled her brows in remembrance.

"Because if he didn't the case is solved!" said Mrs. Bantry. "I'm sure I'm right. What is easier than to pretend you're called up to town? You telephone to your maid from Paddington or whatever station you arrive at, and as she comes up to town, you go down again. The young man calls by appointment, he's doped, you set the stage for the burglary, overdoing it as much as possible. You telephone the police, give a description of your scapegoat, and off you go to town again. Then you arrive home by a later train and do the surprised innocent."

"But why should she steal her own jewels, Dolly?"

"They always do," said Mrs. Bantry. "And anyway, I can think of hundreds of reasons. She may have wanted money at once—old Sir Sidney wouldn't give her cash, perhaps, so she pretends the jewels are stolen and then sells them secretly. Or she may be being blackmailed by someone who threatened to tell her husband or Sir Sidney's wife. Or she may have already sold the jewels and Sir Sidney was getting ratty and asking to see them, so she had to do something about it. That's done a good deal in books.

"Or perhaps he was going to have them reset and she'd got paste replicas. Or—here's a very good idea and not so much done in books—she pretends they are stolen, gets in an awful state and he gives her a fresh lot. So she gets two lots instead of one. That kind of woman, I am sure, is most frightfully artful."

"You *are* clever, Dolly," said Jane admiringly. "I never thought of that."

"You may be clever, but she doesn't say you're right," said Colonel Bantry. "I incline to suspect the city gentleman. He'd know the sort of telegram to get the lady out of the way, and he could manage the rest easily enough with the help of a new lady friend. Nobody seems to have thought of asking *him* for an alibi."

"What do you think, Miss Marple?" asked Jane, turning toward the old lady who had sat silent, a frown on her face.

"My dear, I really don't know what to say. Sir Henry will laugh, but I recall no village parallel to help me this time. Of course there are several questions that suggest themselves. For instance, the servant question. In—ahem—an irregular ménage of the kind you describe, the servant employed would doubtless be perfectly aware of the state of things, and a really nice girl would not take such a place—her mother wouldn't let her for a minute.

"So I think we can assume that the maid was *not* a really trustworthy character. She may have been in league with the thieves.

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She would leave the house open for them and actually go to London so as to divert suspicion from herself. I must confess that that seems the most probable solution. Only if ordinary thieves were concerned, it seems very odd. It seems to argue more knowledge than a maid servant was likely to have."

Miss Marple paused and then went on dreamily.

"I can't help feeling that there was some—well, what I must describe as personal feeling about the whole thing. Supposing somebody had a spite, for instance? Don't you think that would explain things better? A deliberate attempt to get him into trouble. That's what it looks like. And yet—that's not entirely satisfactory . . ."

"Why, Doctor, you haven't said anything," said Jane. "I'd forgotten you."

"I'm always getting forgotten," said the grizzled doctor sadly. "I must have a very inconspicuous personality."

"Oh, no!" said Jane. "Do tell us what you think?"

"I'm rather in the position of agreeing with everyone's solutions —and yet with none of them. I myself have a far-fetched and probably totally erroneous theory that the wife may have had something to do with it. Sir Sidney's wife, I mean. I've no grounds for thinking so—only you would be surprised if you knew the extraordinary things that a wronged wife will do."

"Oh, Dr. Lloyd," cried Miss Marple excitedly. "How clever of you. And I never thought of poor Mrs. Pebmarsh."

Jane stared at her.

"Mrs. Pebmarsh? Who is Mrs. Pebmarsh?"

"Well—" Miss Marple hesitated. "I don't know that she really comes in. She's a laundress. And she stole an opal pin that was pinned onto a blouse and put it in another woman's house."

Jane looked more fogged than ever.

"And that makes it all perfectly clear to you, Miss Marple?" said Sir Henry, with his twinkle.

But to his surprise Miss Marple shook her head.

"No, I'm afraid it doesn't. I must confess myself completely at a loss. What I do realize is that women must stick together—one should, in an emergency, stand by one's own sex. I think that's the moral of the story Miss Helier has told us."

"I must confess that particular ethical significance of the mystery had escaped me," said Sir Henry gravely. "Perhaps I shall see the significance of your point more clearly when Miss Helier has revealed the solution."

"Eh?" said Jane, looking bewildered.

"I was observing that, in childish language, we 'give up.' You and you alone, Miss Helier, have had the high honor of presenting such an absolutely baffling mystery that

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even Miss Marple has to confess herself defeated."

"You all give up?" asked Jane.

"Yes." After a minute's silence during which he waited for the others to speak, Sir Henry constituted himself spokesman once more. "That is to say we stand or fall by the sketchy solutions we have tentatively advanced. One each for the mere men, two for Miss Marple, and a round dozen from Mrs. B."

"It was not a dozen," said Mrs. Bantry. "They were variations on a main theme. And how often am I to tell you that I will not be called Mrs. B?"

"So you all give up," said Jane thoughtfully. "That's very interesting."

She leaned back in her chair and began to polish her nails.

"Well," said Mrs. Bantry. "Come on, Jane. What is the solution?"

"The solution?"

"Yes. What really happened?"

Jane stared at her.

"I haven't the least idea."

"*What?*"

"I've always wondered. I thought you were all so clever that one of you would be able to tell *me*."

Everybody harbored feelings of annoyance. It was all very well for Jane to be so beautiful—but at this moment everyone felt that stupidity could be carried too far. Even the most transcendent loveliness could not excuse it.

"You mean the truth was never discovered?" said Sir Henry.

"No. That's why, as I say, I did think you would be able to tell *me*."

"Well, I'm—I'm—" said Colonel Bantry, words failing him.

"You are the most aggravating girl, Jane," said his wife. "Anyway, I'm sure and always shall be that I was right. If you just tell us the proper names of all the people, I shall be *quite* sure."

"I don't think I could do that," said Jane slowly.

"No, dear," said Miss Marple. "Miss Helier couldn't do that."

"Of course she could," said Mrs. Bantry. "Don't be so high-minded, Jane. We older folks must have a bit of scandal. At any rate, tell us who the city magnate really was."

But Jane shook her head, and Miss Marple, in her old-fashioned way, continued to support the girl.

"It must have been a very distressing business," Miss Marple said.

"No," said Jane truthfully. "I think—I think I rather enjoyed it."

"Well, perhaps you did," said Miss Marple. "I suppose it was a break in the monotony. What play were you acting in?"

"*Smith*."

"Oh, yes. That's one of Mr. Somerset Maugham's, isn't it? His plays are very clever, I think. I've seen nearly all of them."

"You're reviving it to go on tour next Autumn, aren't you?" asked Mrs. Bantry.

Jane nodded.

"Well," said Miss Marple rising, "I must go home. Such late hours!

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But we've had a very entertaining evening. Most unusually so."

"I'm sorry you're angry with me," said Jane. "About not knowing the end, I mean. I suppose I should have said so sooner."

Her tone sounded wistful. Dr. Lloyd rose gallantly to the occasion.

"My dear young lady, why should you? You gave us a very pretty problem to sharpen our wits on. I am only sorry none of us could solve it convincingly."

"Speak for yourself," said Mrs. Bantry. "I *did* solve it. I'm sure I am right."

"Do you know, I really believe you are," said Jane. "What you said sounded so probable."

"Which of her seven solutions do you refer to?" Sir Henry teased.

Dr. Lloyd gallantly assisted Miss Marple to put on her goloshes. "Just in case," as the old lady explained. The doctor was to be her escort to her old-world cottage. Wrapped in several woollen shawls, Miss Marple wished everyone good night once more. She came to Jane Helier last and leaning forward, she murmured something in the actress's ear. A startled "Oh!" burst from Jane—so loud as to cause the others to turn their heads.

Smiling and nodding, Miss Marple made her exit, Jane Helier staring after her.

"Are you coming to bed, Jane?" asked Mrs. Bantry. "What's the matter with you? You're staring as though you'd seen a ghost."

With a deep sigh Jane came to herself and followed her hostess up the staircase. Mrs. Bantry came into the girl's room with her.

"Your fire's nearly out," said Mrs. Bantry, giving it a vicious and ineffectual poke. "They can't have made it up properly. How stupid housemaids are. Still, I suppose we are rather late tonight. Why, it's actually past one o'clock!"

"Do you think there are many people like her?" asked Jane Helier.

She was sitting on the side of the bed apparently wrapped in thought.

"Like the housemaid?"

"No. Like that funny old woman—what's her name—Marple?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose she's a fairly common type in a small village."

"Oh, dear," said Jane. "I don't know what to do."

She sighed deeply.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm worried."

"What about?"

Jane Helier was portentously solemn as she said, "Do you know what that queer old lady whispered to me before she went out of the door tonight?"

"No. What?"

"She said: *'I shouldn't do it if I were you, my dear. Never put yourself too much in another woman's power, even if you do think she's your friend at the moment.'* You know, Dolly, that's awfully true."

"The maxim? Yes, perhaps it is. But I don't see the application."

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"I suppose you can't ever really trust a woman. And I *should* be in her power. I never thought of that."

"What woman are you talking about?"

"Netta Greene, my understudy."

"What on earth does Miss Marple know about your understudy?"

"I supposed she guessed—but I can't see how."

"Jane, will you kindly tell me at once what you are talking about?"

"The story. The one I told. Oh, Dolly, that woman—the one that took Charles from me?"

Mrs. Bantry nodded, casting her mind back rapidly to the first of Jane's unfortunate marriages—to Charles Averbury, the actor.

"He married her; and I could have told him how it would be. Charles doesn't know, but she's carrying on with Sir Joseph Salmon—week ends with him at the bungalow I told you about. I wanted her shown up—I would like everyone to know the sort of woman she was. And you see, with a burglary, everything would be bound to come out."

"Jane!" gasped Mrs. Bantry. "Did *you* engineer this story you've been telling us?"

Jane nodded.

"That's why I chose *Smith*. I wear parlormaid's kit in it, you know. So I should have it handy. And when they sent for me to the police station it's the easiest thing in the world to say I was rehearsing my part with my understudy at the hotel. Really, of course, we would be at the bungalow—I just to open the door and bring in the cocktails, and Netta to pretend to be me. He'd never see *her* again, of course, so there would be no fear of his recognizing her. And I can make myself look quite different as a parlormaid; and besides, one doesn't look at parlormaids as though they were people.

"We planned to drag him out into the road afterwards, bag the jewel case, telephone the police, and get back to the hotel. I shouldn't like the poor young man to suffer, but Sir Henry didn't seem to think he would, did he? And she'd be in the papers and everything—and Charles would see what she was really like."

Mrs. Bantry sat down and groaned.

"Oh, my poor head. And all the time—Jane Helier, you deceitful girl! Telling us that story the way you did!"

"I *am* a good actress," said Jane complacently. "I always have been, whatever people choose to say. I didn't give myself away, did I?"

"Miss Marple was right," murmured Mrs. Bantry. "The personal element. Oh, yes, the personal element. Jane, my good child, do you realize that theft is theft, and you might have been sent to prison?"

"Well, none of you guessed," said Jane. "Except Miss Marple." The worried expression returned to her face. "Dolly, do you *really* think there are many like her?"

"Frankly, I don't," said Mrs. Bantry.

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Jane sighed again.

"Still, one had better not risk it. And of course I *should* be in Netta's power—that's true enough. She might turn against me or blackmail me or something. She helped me think out the details and professed to be devoted to me, but one never *does* know with women. No, I think Miss Marple was right. I had better not risk it."

"But, my dear, you did risk it."

"Oh, no." Jane opened her blue eyes very wide. "Don't you understand? *None of this has happened yet!* I was—well, trying it on the dog, so to speak."

"I don't pretend to understand your theatrical slang," said Mrs. Bantry with dignity. "Do you mean this is a future project—not a past deed?"

"I was going to do it this autumn—in September. I don't know what to do now."

"And Jane Marple guessed—actually guessed the truth and never told us," said Mrs. Bantry wrathfully.

"I think that was why she said that—about women sticking together. She wouldn't give me away before the men. That was nice of her. I don't mind *your* knowing, Dolly."

"Well, give the idea up, Jane. I beg you to!"

"I think I shall," murmured Miss Helier. "There might be other Miss Marples . . ."

"Q"

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a new story by

NEDRA TYRE

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NEDRA TYRE**

TITLE: ***The Delicate Murderer***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A sensitive and "different" tale of murder—indeed, what might be called a murder of some delicacy . . . with meanings below the surface of ordinary storytelling, and with overtones barely hinted at . . .*

ONE OF OUR FAMILY HAD TO MURder Cousin Lucy. And one of us did . . . It was not only fitting that the murderer should be one of us, it was altogether necessary. We all realized that she ought to die and that night it became obvious that she must die. Even so, her murder was long overdue.

Now it is quite true that she left each of us a substantial amount of money. But money had nothing to do with her death. This was not murder from greed or jealousy, hatred or revenge—none of those usual violent and deadly passions. It was murder for love, murder because of love.

Yes, she had to die. Those of us who loved her knew that. She needed her release and we needed ours from watching her long struggle toward death.

How to explain all this?

How, above all, to describe Cousin Lucy?

There is no way. My sister Meg is the writer in the family; her brain mints words, all true, all sound—coin of the realms of intellect and emotion. Images and metaphors flutter to her typewriter like pigeons around St. Mark's, and her fingers on the keyboard catapult bright, living words onto the virgin white of the paper.

For Cousin Lucy, though, Meg had no words. I begged her to de-

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scribe Lucy; she gave out Cousin earnest promise to try and she did try. Lucy into words. Later I rummaged in the wastebasket for some I watched her drive. of her nail-biting, pursed-lip attempts. Everything she had written was X-ed out.

Then, months afterward, when she was away on one of her trips, a card came postmarked Charlotte Amalie, its This Side For Message crowded with her miniature handwriting, begging me to release her from her promise to describe Cousin Lucy. Meg wrote: Cousin Lucy is simply Cousin Lucy—that's all I'll ever be able to say about her.

So if Meg could not describe Cousin Lucy how can I?

Yet I feel that I too must try.

And I must also try to make it clear why one of us had to murder her.

I have never known Cousin Lucy's exact relationship to us. We five children called her Cousin Lucy or sometimes used the diminutive Cousin Lu. To tell the truth, I am not sure on which side of the family the relationship existed. Meg had all the facts, and when it came time to give the papers details for Cousin Lucy's obituary—all so proper, with naturally no hint of murder—Meg reeled off dates and events like so much silk thread from a spool.

I paid no attention to what Meg was saying—just as the next day I paid no attention to the pretty, non-committal face in the photograph that accompanied the information Meg had given the reporter. For me none of it had any real connection with our darling Cousin Lucy; though at the end somewhere it would have seemed quite proper to me if the paragraph had said: her survivors—among them her murderer—include so and so.

But I must get on with this gentle case of murder:

Cousin Lucy came to live with us and take care of us the day after our parents were killed in a plane crash. Our grandparents loved us—they eventually even liked us and became our very good friends; they enjoyed our brief descents on their hospitality; it was pleasant to have all five of us children for a week end—sometimes they could even survive us for a week; but they had no inclination to raise a second family.

So Cousin Lucy took over—at whose suggestion I do not know. She was then in that adulthood which seems ancient to a child, but she was still a young woman and quite lovely to look at. I cannot imagine what she saw in us; we used to speculate that the reason she assumed the burden of us must have been some great disappointment in love, or something equally staggering that would make her renounce the world. But it was no such thing, of course. Cousin Lucy was incapable of renouncing anything. She was beyond disappoint-

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ment—or rather, she would have welcomed it, as she welcomed every human experience.

Cousin Lucy's air of high adventure in the commonplaces of living, of being willing to attempt anything, was contagious. Still she held us in check, letting us get near precipices and then warning us just in time.

As an example, I will mention my sister Meg's yearning for experience—blatting at us that she was going to be a writer, needed experience, and intended getting it, with a glint in her eye that presaged swarms of lovers, orgies of hashish, heroin, and other unnameable pleasures, all for her art. And Cousin Lucy—how I am not sure—somehow made Meg see that writing had nothing to do with experience *per se*, or at least the kind Meg was straining for; Emily Dickinson in her self-made prison, Emily Bronte shackled to her moors—what relationship could there have been between their true kind of writing and the types of experience Meg had in mind?

As another example, there was Ruth Elizabeth who almost came a cropper in love—our warm, beautiful sister who now has six children. It still hurts me to recall her despair when Alex Smith said no, thank you, practically at the door of the church. Cousin Lucy did not minimize Ruth Elizabeth's unhappiness over Alex; she helped Ruth Elizabeth live through it and somehow all that anguish eventually increased Ruth Elizabeth's happiness when she and Jim Black were married.

I'm failing. That's obvious. I can't really describe Cousin Lucy, so I am trying to show her as she lived her life with us; and all I am accomplishing is to paint her as a manipulating woman. She wasn't that at all. She welcomed whatever she saw in a developing child and she helped all five of us over the awful threshold of adolescence.

Whatever gifts we had she encouraged. There was my sister Kate on fire to be an actress, dramatic all over the place; then when we'd had about all the burning of her hard gemlike flame that we could take—at breakfast Juliet's scene in Friar Laurence's cell, for lunch Blanche DuBois's encounter with the paper boy, and for supper assorted Ibsen heroines—Cousin Lucy took her aside and catechized her about her intentions. Do you want to be just a showoff? Cousin Lucy asked. Do you merely want people to applaud you? To simply get your picture in the papers? That won't do, Kate—none of that's good enough. You must want to be an actress for a reason beyond all that.

And there was Tom, our brother, the only boy among four girls. From the time he was ten, when an audacious show of personality over brains (the latter belonging to Jim Black who later married our sister Ruth Elizabeth) won him the election as boy mayor of our town, it was apparent he would become a

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politician. And Cousin Lucy encouraged him—no, not encouraged—there I go misrepresenting her again. She simply caused whatever gifts we had to flourish.

I was the middle child and I felt lost and overwhelmed in the midst of all those talents: Meg the writer; Ruth Elizabeth with her great gift for love; Kate the actress; and Tom the politician. Oh, the heartbreak and shame I suffered when I realized I had no talent of any kind! I was nothing, of no use to anybody, I hadn't earned the space I took up in the world.

For a time I refused to accept my inadequacy. I insisted I would be a painter, so I donned a smock and stretched canvases; and I rebelled for months against Cousin Lucy's tactful suggestion that enthusiasm for an art has no relationship to a talent for it, and it was fatal to mistake the two.

But I felt so swallowed up by the gifts that blossomed around me that I couldn't admit I had none. My lack was like a disfigurement and I tried to hide it, as if I were lame or harelipped.

Then one day Cousin Lucy comforted me and set me right. While I wailed and carried on she took a rag dipped in turpentine and wiped the splotches of paint from my face and hands.

"How silly of you to judge yourself by what others have," she said. "You see their gifts without seeing their responsibilities. Think of Meg for the rest of her life at the mercy of an empty sheet of paper, writing about life, not living it. Think of Tom, forever at the beck and call of a man with a vote, always having to manipulate people and becoming a master of equivocation. Think of Ruth Elizabeth with her children, her life not her own but always an involvement with them. Think of Kate, living on applause, starving for a part to play—no relationship will ever be so dear to her as some make-believe character she must act."

Yet it was not quite like that. She did not belittle them or their ambitions just to soothe me—it was not like that at all. I simply have no means of explaining quite how Cousin Lucy made me see that I had my own kind of worth. As Meg had said, Cousin Lucy was Cousin Lucy, and there are no words for her.

We five were Cousin Lucy's life—her whole life. Of course, we sympathized with her, pitied her for having us around her neck. If it hadn't been for us, you'd have married, we piped throughout our childhood and adolescence and young adulthood. Through the years her laughter dismissed that recurring pronouncement. There are so many wonderful men, she said; how would I have ever been able to decide which one to marry? And Ruth Elizabeth would invariably speak up then: But you've had no children of your own. To Ruth Elizabeth that was tragedy. I've had

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you, Cousin Lucy would answer; I've had all the fun of children without having had the pain of bearing them. I've had all the best of it, Lucy would insist.

Cousin Lucy's love for us was constant. She fed us with her great spirit. Even so, she took a month off each year, and post cards and letters would come to us from exotic and exciting places. Romantics all, we told each other that our wonderful Cousin Lucy had a lover, probably married to a crippled, hopelessly incapacitated wife whom out of loyalty he wouldn't divorce, and Cousin Lucy wouldn't have let him anyway; but fate relented and they managed this one month of bliss together each year.

That was not at all the case, I'm sure; and though Cousin Lucy did come back exuberant and renewed, we didn't ask for particulars about her vacations. We accepted the presents, and better than the presents were the other bestowals: for Kate there were long talks of plays Cousin Lucy had seen; for Meg recitals about the haunts and homes of writers (even mementoes: a sprig of grass from the grave of Yeats, a pebble from Dove Cottage); for Tom news of rallies and political speeches.

For me there were other things. Again I do not know how to write of them—of these matters that meant so much to me. She would say something like this: on the plane it was midnight, there was a full moon, I looked out of the window and the moon was in the river; or, in St. Stephen's Green a child came up to me and offered me a piece of peppermint candy. Such statements, unelaborated, made me feel I had partaken of the natural universe, had shared humanity. I apologize if that sounds pretentious or grandiloquent.

No, I cannot capture Cousin Lucy's essence in words, and I doubt that I can show you the urgency of our knowing that *she had to be murdered.*

Yet that awesome moment finally came . . .

The morning that precipitated the murder went by as usual; then despair assaulted us between a clock's tick and its answering tock. Aunt Lucy had a heart attack—and then followed helplessness, months of Cousin Lucy's being in bed, with everyone, especially herself, knowing she would never leave her bed, and her eyes begging for death.

But we kept delaying our gentle murder. The miracle of recovery was around the corner, we reassured each other, and there were new medicines, a special course of treatment, a doctor somewhere who could make her well.

It was the only time we resorted to fantasy and unreality—they were not habitual to us—and we had to tear those two illusions from ourselves and embrace the truth: Cousin Lucy would not recover—it was folly to think so, even to hope

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so; she could linger on for years.

There are those who take to bed as to a refuge or a battlement, who can dispense favors, orders, carry on a life reclining on pillows and from beneath coverlets. Cousin Lucy was not of their company; time spent in bed was her enemy; there were no ways to conquer it and few to subdue it.

Our stabs at trying to cheer her were appallingly unsuccessful: we read to her and we tried to devise games. Ruth Elizabeth's children, who had gamboled with Cousin Lucy their short lives long, were timid as they stood outside her door, or in their bolder moments made shy approaches to her bedside for curt little bows or a piped formal good morning, Cousin Lucy.

Tom brought Cousin Lucy the most pleasure and forgetfulness: he purchased numerous collections of reproductions of paintings—those portfolios containing ten or twelve separate prints; and he found a small easel in an antique shop which he set near Cousin Lucy's bed within easy reach of her right hand—so that with very little effort she could change the paintings to suit her fancy.

We all hovered around Cousin Lucy. Ruth Elizabeth would leave her children in a maid's care, spend the days with Cousin Lucy, then rush home only in time to hear her children's prayers; Meg stopped taking those long stimulating trips essential to her writing career and tried to concentrate in her workroom over the garage, leaving it hourly for anxious inquiries about Cousin Lucy; Kate flew in over week ends, weary from two performances on Saturday; Tom contrived as often as he could to withdraw from committee meetings and begged off from what he called "political spade work and fence repairing."

But the time soon came when even these jabs at normal living ceased. Meg would not leave the house, even for her workroom over the garage; Tom moved back home—he said it was a brief holiday while he read and made notes for speeches, but the brief holiday lengthened to weeks and weeks, and his wife seldom joined him, though she often made curt long distance calls warning him that his career was in jeopardy; Ruth Elizabeth stopped making her darting nightly returns home to Jim Black and the children—she stayed near Cousin Lucy all the time, and Jim Black, though he too doted on Cousin Lucy, was fit to be tied; Kate actually left her play, pretending she was bone-weary of the part and it was time someone else had a chance at it, but Kate was the kind of actress who grew better as a run progressed.

All these excuses were plausible enough even though they were lies; the truth was we were solidified, immobilized, because of Cousin Lucy. Individual days did not seem

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to pass, but time with its bewildering way of limping through minutes and hours yet vaulting over weeks and months—time stumbled and hurried.

And all the while Cousin Lucy's eyes begged us for death.

Each of us knew that something had to be done. Cousin Lucy could not take her own life—it was up to one of us. Not that this was spoken of or hinted at: the thought of murder was a cocoon in which we existed, swaddled, quiescent, until someone would have the courage to take action; only then could we begin our own lives again.

I came to the decision that I must commit the murder. That conclusion was reached peacefully, as I think all momentous decisions must be reached—not in a state of emotional turmoil but in the calm acceptance that there was no other course.

It came to me during one of the last times I was alone with Cousin Lucy. There had not been any need for words between us, but that afternoon she spoke as if I would have need of what she had to say. "I've been prouder of you than any of them," she said. "I know they've accomplished a great deal, and they will accomplish so much more. But you've gone beyond all that. You've always seen things as they are, you've always recognized the truth."

"I've seen things only because you've helped me to see them, Cousin Lucy."

Then she said something I had not expected to hear, and that I never dreamed she would say: "If I'd ever had a child, I'd have wanted it to be you."

I could not answer her and she did not expect me to. We sat in silence and her delicate hand reached toward the easel to change one of the reproductions.

I felt then that I must pick a subject far away from what she had just said—I could not trust myself otherwise. "Cousin Lucy, you haven't once put any of the Renoirs on the easel. Why not?"

She gave me her loveliest smile, the one that invariably told me she was especially pleased with what she called my powers of observation. Her reply, though, was quite matter-of-fact. "Each to his own taste," Cousin Lucy said. "For me Renoir's painting is too lush, too pretty. He leaves out grief and despair and pain. He's bigger than life. But life itself is enough. A painter doesn't need to go beyond life."

Silence again, and then, when I got up to leave, she repeated those miraculous words: "If I'd ever had a child, I'd have wanted it to be you."

So there it was. Those words placed an obligation on me. I had to take her life. I was the one she loved the most. Then I saw that even if she had not spoken that way, the task would still have been mine. I was committed to no thing (except in a strange way to learning the truth) and to no person. It would

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not be fair to the others to expect them to commit murder: Ruth Elizabeth had her children, Meg her writing, Kate her acting, Tom his politics—each of their careers would be in continuous jeopardy with a murder in the background, however gently it was done.

Yes, I must do it. I resolved to do murder and do it quickly.

It was staggering then to learn that with all my other lack of talents I also had no talent for murder.

I knew quite well the kind of murder it must be: a delicate one, with no hint of violence. I made one puny attempt at devising such a crime. At the Public Library I whispered discreetly to Miss Martha Green that I wanted to see the books on forensic medicine on the locked, restricted shelves. Miss Martha wouldn't hear of such a thing. "Indeed, I will not let you see them," she said. "Those hideous books, full of bloated bodies and people dug up out of concrete. Why, you wouldn't be able to eat anything for weeks if I let you see those books! What on earth are you thinking about?"

I retreated.

There would have to be another way—perhaps an overdose of sleeping pills.

But the duty of murder was to be taken away from me.

The afternoon I got home from the Public Library everything erupted at once. We needed a switchboard to handle all the local and long distance calls coming in. Meg had almost simultaneous calls from her publisher and her literary agent saying something had to be done about her new book promised months ago; Kate's manager insisted that if she didn't get to New York immediately for a certain audition she would end up the coldest property on Broadway; Ruth Elizabeth fainted dead away on the sitting-room sofa, and the doctor who had come for his daily look-in on Cousin Lucy said he had warned her weeks ago that she would lose her baby unless she started taking care of herself; and long-suffering Jim Black, when he learned of the doctor's warning, raved and ranted and made all kinds of threats. Interlarded with all these excitements were chain calls for Tom—from his wife who demanded that he come home; from politicians urgently summoning him to the state capital, and Tom's mild protests of, but don't you think I'm too young to attempt that yet—and then Tom's statement that an illness in the family would prevent him from conducting an effective campaign.

The only possible way of composing all those thwarted lives was murder. Cousin Lucy must die, and I determined that I would commit the crime before the night was over. An overdose of sleeping pills would to be the means.

Later my hands were perfectly steady as I carried up Cousin Lucy's nightcap of weak tea, thickened as

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she liked it with enough sugar to make it syrupy. My hands were cunning then, slopping a bit of the tea in the saucer. I said something about how clumsy I was and went to the bathroom to empty the saucer and to add the sleeping pills to the tea.

The bottle of pills was gone ! I clawed among the few supplies in Cousin Lucy's neat medicine cabinet. But it was not there.

Cousin Lucy's voice called to me, "Come along, dear, it doesn't matter that a bit of tea has spilled. Please bring it in to me."

There was nothing to do but hand her the cup.

Her smile when she reached for it was the most reassuring she had ever given me and her glance intimated that she knew quite well what I had wanted to do. And her expression said that everything had been taken care of—that I was not to worry, her murder had been arranged. I had the curiously positive feeling that Cousin Lucy had seen or heard something that she should not have seen or overheard.

And that night death came to Cousin Lucy.

One of us committed murder—of so delicate and gentle a nature that it was entered on the certificate as death from natural causes. Our kind doctor, who was Cousin Lucy's dear friend, said she had had another heart attack, this one fatal, in her sleep. With Cousin Lucy's medical history there was no reason for the doctor to be suspicious, no reason for him to order an autopsy.

The five of us were stunned into serenity; we were split by our relief and by our sadness, so that somehow each emotion neutralized the other. Then the next day we saw Cousin Lucy to her grave and for the first time in months we rejoined the living. Cousin Lucy's murder was what we had needed: she had known it—and we had known it.

Tom won his campaign and became the youngest senator ever elected in our state. Meg packed her bag and portable typewriter and left for various unknown destinations and the manuscript she finished during her travels was nominated for a National Book Award. Kate's audition convinced the producers she was right for the play and the part made her a famous star. Ruth Elizabeth at last obeyed the doctor, took care of herself, and had her baby—the most beautiful child of all her beautiful children, this one a little girl, and of course she was named Lucy. Only a few weeks after little Lucy's birth Ruth Elizabeth and Jim Black moved into our big house, and the tremendous old place grew even lovelier with all of them in it; and Cousin Lucy's room was kept exactly as she had left it.

Our lives were now what Cousin Lucy would have wanted. And a murderer was among us—a murderer to whom we owed it all. And as the good days passed, my mind hungered for the name of our bene-

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factor. I had set out to see the world and wherever I traveled I would stop in the middle of a view and wonder who it was. To whom did we all owe so much.

I had to find the answer. And understanding me better than I understood myself, Cousin Lucy would have realized that I *had* to know the murderer's name. Cousin Lucy had never withheld knowledge from me, so I was sure she had managed somehow to leave me this information.

When I could no longer exist without knowing the truth, I went back home and found the old house had grown in beauty and so had my sister Ruth Elizabeth. By then she had had another baby, making six children in all, and nothing anywhere could have been more pleasing or charming than all of them waiting in the vast library to greet me. After hurried kisses and embraces I excused myself only moments after I had arrived and went to Cousin Lucy's room. I had come back to seek the name of Cousin Lucy's murderer and I could delay my search no longer.

The answer was there in her room—I was sure of it as I turned the doorknob.

Ruth Elizabeth had kept the room just as it had been when Cousin Lucy lived in it. The beautiful order of Cousin Lucy's possessions impressed me—there was a sense of serenity and infinite peace: the books in their exact order on the shelves; the neat patterns of handkerchiefs in quilted holders, paired stockings in cubicled boxes, bracelets and necklaces coiled like exotic snakes asleep in the drawers; the symmetry and beauty in the pictures on the wall, in the precise position of the chairs, in the tidy desk top; and pervading everything, a fragrance of sachet, a provocative blend of flowers and spice.

Then I looked at her handsome high bed, with its simple white cover, and beside it the easel on which she had kept the reproductions Tom had given her—the prints that had pleased her so much in those difficult days of waiting to be murdered. I walked toward the easel as a breeze belled out the white curtains.

And then I noticed the painter's name printed across the portfolio's cover—it was Renoir. And that seemed strange—that Renoir should be the last artist Cousin Lucy had looked at. Lucy had never liked Renoir's work—hadn't we talked about her indifference to it?

Nevertheless, there is was—the Renoir portfolio.

Had Cousin Lucy had a change of heart about Renoir? Had she, perhaps in her last hours, come to accept Renoir? Was that her final message to me?—that in the end one should accept everything, even a painter whom one did not like . . .

Then I knew it was no such thing: Cousin Lucy would not have been guilty of platitudes in her dy-

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ing any more than she would have been guilty of platitudes in her living. There would have been no deathbed change in her character, no last minute change in her taste. Her last hours had not been eased by looking at Renoir.

And then it came to me—gently, surely, with no doubt of any kind. Cousin Lucy understood that I would have to know the name of the murderer and she had seen to it that I would know. She had done it with the directness and simplicity characteristic of all her actions; she had spelled it out for me and left it there for me to discover.

All my life I had appealed to her for answers. From the time I asked my first question of her she had said: look for it with clear eyes and you will find it.

Now I was looking with clear eyes.

Renoir.

R. E. Noir.

R. E. Black.

Our sweet, lovely, gentle sister, Ruth Elizabeth Black, mother of six children, was the delicate murderer.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **SHELLEY SMITH**

TITLE: ***Did It Happen?***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Ruttenham, England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *He was a little man, with a pale, clever face—and he had a beautiful wife. Add another ingredient and you have—a story?*

I NEARLY COMMITTED A MURDER once. The horror of it, even after all these years, still makes the hair crawl on my scalp. And I only venture to write of it now because I'm pretty sure he must be dead, the little man; and I know Eulalia will never read it.

I met him while I was staying with a cousin who had a house in a village I shall call Ruttenham. We had weakly allowed ourselves to be roped in to a tea party, the way one does when hopelessly cornered in the street. And he was there, with his wife. They were newcomers to the village and the tea party had been got up for the purpose of introducing them to people.

He was a small slender man with a square, pale, clever face and a quiet, pleasant manner. He looked like a lawyer or . . . an archivist perhaps; something refined, erudite, and musty.

He was being very polite and gentlemanly with plates of cake and sandwiches in each hand when our hostess brought us together. His pale blue glance met mine: "There is a tribe of Indians, I understand," he murmured, "who stick their tongues out at one another in greeting. It seems to me at the moment an eminently practical convention, hampered as I am." And then, noticing a fat lady with an empty plate, he darted away and bowed before her with his burden.

That was all our conversation; and I certainly would never have given him another thought if it had not been for his wife. She was such a surprise. In fact, she was a distinct shock. For one thing, she could hardly have been more than

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twenty, which made her at least thirty years younger than her husband.

For another, she was a dazzling beauty, a real gasper, with that golden skin and rich, dark-gold hair one sometimes sees in Tuscany, and wide dark-lashed blue eyes like a doll's.

There was something actually a bit doll-like about her.

The next day I returned to London, and then back to my home in Italy, and forgot all about them. Or at least I thought I had; and honestly, when the small elderly gentleman with the pallid sceptical face popped into my mind some months later, I had no recollection of having seen him before. He merely seemed astonishingly vivid, with that vitality which charms a writer into work.

As a matter of fact, I never care to write about people I know, nor, unlike Henry James, to build up on incidents that have been told to me. But of course, I told myself when at last I remembered (waking up suddenly in the middle of the night to a vision of Eulalia, radiantly golden), he hardly counted as a person I knew—he was scarcely more than a glimpse of some harmless-looking stranger passing in the street whom I would have no qualms about using in a story. And in any case it was too late to draw back: I had got involved in their imaginary lives.

I settled them in a villa in Italy, as a nice romantic background. The story was a satirical twist on the old "Daddy Long Legs" theme. He was her guardian and she an orphaned heiress. As soon as she left her convent school he married her before she had a chance to see another man—to prevent her being snatched away from him by some other fortune hunter.

He retired, and carried her away with him to Italy for safety. Only, of course, Italy is the last place where a simple, unspoiled, natural girl like Eulalia would be safe.

In no time at all she found herself a youth as handsome and golden as herself—a raw godlike fisher-lad. (I planned some pretty pastoral scenes with them among the rocks and in the pine woods.) The husband, in many ways a kindly and considerate man, saw no reason to spoil her pleasure—until the foolish girl took it into her head to leave him for her lover.

That would never do. He could not let his golden girl, in more senses than one, slip through his fingers. There was to be a highly dramatic chapter where she ran off one night with her little suitcase and he went after her in the car down the steep mountain road . . . the headlights pinpointing the terrified figure . . . following her . . . gaining on her . . . swerving as she swerves, stumbling, screaming . . . and to save herself from being jammed against the rock-face she made a wild lunge to the edge

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of the path, the car swung after her, and—over the precipice she fell . . . A neat little murder that would look like an accident, as if she had fallen from the path in the dark. He inherited the money and after that it only remained for Nemesis to catch up with him . . .

I was nearly at the end of the novel when I had a letter from my cousin. In a postscript she said, "Do you remember the 'beautiful talking doll': Big scandal here over her behavior with a garage-hand from the local garage."

I confess it did make me feel a bit squeamish when I read that, as if in some way I had caused it to happen. Which, of course, was absurd; it merely showed that my psychology was right. I resolutely put it out of my mind.

I finished the book, had the manuscript typed, and in due course brought it back with me to England on my annual visit. I had arranged to stay at my cousin's house and look after her collie while she was abroad. So I suppose it was inevitable that sooner or later I should run into the little man and his wife.

I was taking Bella the collie for her evening promenade and thinking my pleasant thoughts when suddenly the little man shot out at me in the dusk through an open gateway, uttering a kind of babbling wail of distress.

"Oh, my God, she's dead," he was saying. "Oh, God, oh, God!" He clutched my arm. "For God's sake, come—I tell you she's dead—I know she's dead."

I followed him with shaking legs, through the garden, past the wide open door, to the garage. The light streamed out; the car was inside, the engine running; and she was lying pinned against the wall.

Together we eased the car off her. She was breathing—I could feel her faint pulse—but there was blood running from her mouth and I would not let him move her. I was afraid of internal hemorrhages. I sent him to phone for a doctor, the tears coursing down his poor white face.

I suppose she must have left the engine running while she hopped out to get her suitcase, and the car had rolled down the slope after her. It *could* have been like that; though it does seem a pretty careless act even for a simpleton.

Mind you, I'm not saying that he did push the car onto her. But that suitcase bothers me. Is it only my own story that suggests to me she was running off to her lover? It is terrifying to see one's inventions come true!

She didn't die, thank God. But I always felt she might have, if I hadn't gone straight back and thrown my manuscript into the fire. I couldn't do otherwise. If she had died, I should have been morally guilty of murder . . . even though the actual crime had been committed by another. But I shall never be sure of that either, shall I?

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EDITORS' NOTE: *When Shelley Smith's story first appeared in England—in the London "Evening Standard"—it was part of a series called* DID IT REALLY HAPPEN? *At the end of the tale the reader was asked to guess whether or not the events actually took place.*

Our own guess, on finishing the story, was immediate and positive. We were absolutely sure in our own minds that Shelley Smith's little chiller was pure fiction. Why were we so certain? Well, it was something the author said in the final paragraph of the story—"if I hadn't gone straight back and thrown my manuscript into the fire." An author, in his or her own sane mind, voluntarily burning the only manuscript of a new book? Unthinkable! We just couldn't believe it—books are too hard to write. All that blood, sweat, and tears—and then fling the manuscript pages into a fire and watch months and months of arduous toil become, in a few minutes, useless ashes! No, we couldn't swallow that.

But, as so often happens to us, we were wrong, dead wrong. The story you have just read—on the author's own word—is true. It really did occur. Shelley Smith did destroy the manuscript of her book. Indeed, truth is stranger than fiction . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***The Tin Box***

TYPE: Human Interest Detective Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Two years on the force, and Ben Corby had a better record than any of the old-timers. It wasn't just muscle either—it was brains. And coolness under fire . . .*

IT WASN'T THAT CHARLIE HOYT FELT old. At fifty-six he was still fit and sound. Even the Police Surgeon had commented on it at the last physical. Maybe, Charlie reasoned, it was the size of the kids these days—like the one sitting beside him in the speeding police car—that made him feel puny. Lord, they sure built them up with vitamins, and not only in bone and muscle structure, but in the brains department too.

At twenty-six Ben Corby was a detective-sergeant. In Charlie's day a man served much longer than two years before he reached the gold badge stage. Ben had been a patrolman ten months and made more intelligent arrests than anyone else in his class. He lasted three months as a plainclothesman and when he broke the back of a stolen car combine, he rated detective, third class. Six months later he was detective first class, skipping one whole category in his skyrocketing advance; and now he was a sergeant.

Furthermore, at Ben's age, Charlie would have been sitting on the edge of the seat, maybe fingering his service gun. Going after a man like Mickey Dillon wasn't in the casual arrest category. Mickey had a fiery and dangerous hatred for policemen. Yet Sergeant Ben Corby sat there relaxed, smoking a cigarette and looking as if he were headed out on a date.

Mickey Dillon was another example of the Sergeant Corby's remarkable work. Mickey had eluded the police for seven months, but Corby found out where he was at

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this moment. A phone call had done it. Some pigeon, cultivated by Corby, had sung his little song. Inspector Charlie Hoyt had been talking to the Sergeant when the call came.

All of which came under the heading of business. Charlie Hoyt's interest in Sergeant Ben Corby was more than mere police business. It was personal, in a manner spelled out by the name Susan.

"When this call came in," Charlie said, "we were talking about my daughter."

Now that was another thing. A Detective-Inspector, head of the whole division, rated more than a casual grin and a nod from a mere Sergeant.

"My favorite subject," Ben said easily. But he colored just a little. The big, overgrown monster did have natural feelings after all.

"We'll continue the subject later," Charlie said. Speeding through city traffic on the way to apprehend a criminal who might shoot it out was hardly the time to discuss romance and marriage. "Right now," Charlie went on, "I want to know where this tip on Dillon came from."

Ben looked at him, without a shred of apology. "From the usual kind of informant, sir." It was obvious he wasn't going to tell.

"All right, Sergeant, I won't press it. Anyway, I just came along for the ride."

"Yes, sir," Ben said noncommittally.

"And it's been my desire for some time," Charlie added, "to see the department's whiz kid work."

"We want Mickey Dillon," Ben said quietly. "We'll get him. And I'm no whiz kid, sir."

The police car, operated by a skillful patrolman-driver, turned the corner onto Tenth, not half a block from the address where Mickey was supposed to be hiding out. Ben knew every tenement and alley in this neighborhood. He knew them because this was where his beat had been and this was where he lived. This was the noisy, busy, old part of the city that Ben loved.

He saw Mickey Dillon too. The short, fat little man with the temper of a viper came strutting out of the building. As luck runs sometimes, Mickey saw the police car and recognized it, even though it was unmarked. Mickey's strut became a mad dash for the nearest corner and, beyond that, the first alley.

Ben reached up behind him, where a rifle was racked, but he passed up the weapon and his fingers closed around the handle of an old-fashioned nightstick. He had the car door open before the sedan stopped, and he was moving along the sidewalk, parallel with the still rolling car, before the Inspector even set foot on the pavement.

Mickey was making time, not looking back, just concentrating on lengthening the distance between himself and the police car. Ben, in the middle of the sidewalk, came to

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an abrupt stop. For a moment the Inspector thought he'd given up the chase. But Ben raised the nightstick above his head, high—as high as his arms would reach. He was holding it at both ends, but not for long. He raised his right leg, like a pitcher winding up. His left hand released its grip and his right brought the club down and out—in a throw that made the piece of oak whistle as it hurtled after Mickey.

The club struck Dillon just below the knees. It seemed to possess life of its own when it hit. Mickey's legs were paralyzed from the force of the contact, but what really stopped Dillon was when the club somehow slid between his legs and tripped him. He skidded ten yards and might have gone farther, but that was where the sidewalk ended in a curb.

Mickey lifted his head. "I'm shot," he yelled. "Get an ambulance! I'm shot!"

Ben had him cuffed and sitting dejectedly on the edge of the curb when Charlie got there. The Inspector picked up the nightstick.

"Sergeant, where'd you learn to throw a stick like that?"

Ben stood Charlie up and began frisking him. "I . . . well, I practised, sir."

"You young squirts never even knew what a nightstick felt like," Charlie said, "let alone master the tricky art of throwing one."

Ben took a small automatic out of a holster strapped to Mickey's right calf. He was kneeling at the moment and he didn't look up.

He said, "Inspector, this is as good a time as any to say it. I'm going to ask Susan to marry me and I'd rather you agreed; but whether you do or not, I'm still going to marry her because she's the kind of a girl I've been looking for all my life, and I knew it the moment I laid eyes on her. So you might as well reconcile yourself—"

"Hold on," Charlie finally managed to explode the words in the middle of Ben's flow of oratory. "Does Susan know about this?"

"If she doesn't," Ben took an interesting looking notebook out of Mickey's pocket and glanced at the contents, "she sure is made of solid rock because every time I kiss her I feel like I'm melting down to nothing and I guess she does too."

"I'll speak to her," Charlie said. He was quite proud of the fact that Ben had even asked him and a little surprised now that he hadn't done so weeks ago.

Mickey Dillon stuck out his cuffed hands. "If I'm interfering in any way, gents, just take off the hardware and I'll give you all the privacy an intimate conversation of this kind deserves."

"Shut up," Ben said. "And get in the car."

Inspector Charles Hoyt, who was just Charlie or Pop in his own home, wisely waited until dessert to open the subject with his daughter

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Susan. He'd done a remarkable job of bringing her up after her mother died years ago. On the other hand, Susan was apt to tell about bringing *him* up.

Either way, they were a compatible pair. They could argue like tigers without getting mad, and Susan was a constant source of wonder to him. That he had sired a girl as lovely as this was life's greatest puzzle for Charlie. Why, she almost surpassed her sainted mother in looks.

He said, "Susie, that young man of yours got himself a tip on Mickey Dillon and I went along to help bring him in."

"You went out on a case?" Susan asked, and her big blue eyes grew wider. "You actually got off that chair behind your desk?"

"I was talking to the lad when the call came in. I tagged along for the ride and it was some ride. Susie, who is Sergeant Ben Corby, anyhow?"

She tested the crust of the apple pie, found it satisfactory. She kept testing it, not raising her eyes. "Ben phoned me before you got home."

Charlie nodded sagely. "So then you know he asked for your hand."

She glanced at him then and the warning flags were going up. "Pop, he told you we were going to be married. He didn't ask—good heavens—'for my hand in marriage.' Are you reading Jane Eyre again?"

"Where's he come from?" Charlie asked. He felt at home asking questions, preparing to spar with her.

"From Encino, California. He graduated from UCLA and became a cop because it's what he wanted to be. He thinks a cop is the most important person in the world. Having a father for one has given me some mental reservations on that score, but I love Ben, Pop, and I'm going to marry him and I don't care if you put him to doing traffic duty at Pelham Avenue and the Boston Post Road."

"His mother's dead, I understand."

"She's dead. He lives with his father. You know all these things. In fact, you know how many pancakes Ben eats for breakfast and where he gets his shoes shined. Don't sit there and ask me a lot of questions, hoping to trap me into some criminal admission that will reflect on the character of the man I love."

"And who was talking about corny expressions?" Charlie observed mildly. "Now listen to me, Susie. I like that boy—he's a fine cop. In fact, he's such a fine cop he makes me a wee bit suspicious. Nobody can be as consistently lucky as he's been—not *that* lucky! On the force only two years and he's got a record better'n mine of thirty years."

"Good for him," she said loyally. "Eat your pie so we can get the dishes done. Ben's coming over tonight."

Charlie nodded. "Any half-witted detective could have told that. The pie's better'n you make for your

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poor old dad. And as for the dishes, you can . . ." his eyes met hers across the table " . . . you can tie on my apron for me."

Charlie got out of there before Ben arrived. He didn't want to meet him tonight, when he was about to dig deeply into Ben's background and root around for something that must be there. It had to be—and it wasn't going to be nice. If he saw and talked to Ben before he got started, he might never go through with it and he felt he had to. As a father, as a police officer, and as Ben's superior.

Charlie drove his eight-year-old car down to almost the foot of Tenth Avenue. It was no strange neighborhood to him. He'd grown up there, walked every block as a patrolman, and battled in every saloon that used to line the street like vending machines. He was surprised that the section hadn't changed much; but when it did, it would likely be swept out of existence as some kind of unwanted eyesore—to be replaced by buildings reaching for air space instead of old-fashioned color.

The saloon was ancient, even for this section of the city. Once it had been Matthew Leary's Bar and Grill, where a man could get a fine free lunch and a cop could get a bountiful meal simply by knocking on the back door. It looked the same today, as if it had been deliberately kept that way.

Charlie walked in and he knew at once that his suspicions had been correct. It wasn't quite eight o'clock —that mysteriously dull time in a big city saloon when patrons are still home waiting for dinner to settle so they can down various fluids and viands a café like this has to offer.

The man back of the bar was Charlie's age. He'd grown hefty and gray, but he was still a fine figure and undoubtedly as powerful as ever. Charlie had once seen him actually bend a steel door to a fancy gambling place.

Charlie walked to the lonely end of the bar and straddled a stool. He said, "How've you been, Frank?"

Frank Denning sighed, drew a beer, and gently put it in front of Charlie. "I knew it was bound to happen," he said. "How'd you find out?"

"Ben was tipped off about Mickey Dillon. Mickey started to run. Ben picked up a nightstick. He held it high, with both hands, then slashed the stick down and out and caught Mickey with it beautifully. Only one man ever threw a stick that way, and he would have had to teach the young squirt."

"He's a good cop," Frank said. "With no legs and his head under his good arm, he'd be a better cop than you, Frank Denning."

"Fifteen years and to you I'm still like a blister on a long beat. It won't go away. Yes, Charlie, he's my son. His mother divorced me, those

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years ago. She married a fine man named Corby and he adopted Ben. Then Corby died and soon after that, Alice died and Ben had nowhere to go. So he came here to me."

"And became a cop."

"Yes, a cop."

"You've been giving him all the tips, showing him the ropes, telling him how to wangle promotions. A fine cop he'll make, with the likes of you backing him up."

Frank leaned against the bar. He was a dangerous man to tangle with, and Charlie hoped he wouldn't have to.

"Fifteen years ago," Frank said, "I was a Detective-Captain and you were a measly Lieutenant. I got myself kicked off the force for taking a bribe. I lost my wife and my son. Now I've got my son back and the past doesn't matter any more—unless you make it matter."

Charlie's mind went back with a rush to the day when they brought Frank up on charges. Ben's father had stood mute and taken his dismissal from the force, even though a criminal court hadn't convicted him. He could have fought back, maybe even won, but he'd taken it. And Charlie had always wondered.

"Frank," he said, "did you have a tin box in those days?"

The dry clean cloth in Frank's hand caressed the bar smoothly and slowly. "I had," he said, "the biggest tin box you ever saw. I did things on a grand scale, if you remember, so when I went wrong, I did that big too."

"The boy know, Frank?"

Frank didn't look up. "No."

Charlie sipped his beer. "It's a closed matter on the books, but not with me. Ben wants to marry my daughter."

"He told me. I knew there'd be trouble, but I couldn't steer him away from her. Matter of fact, I didn't even try."

"I'm sorry you didn't," Charlie said.

Frank looked up. "You wouldn't reach out a hand to shake mine, Charlie?"

Charlie said, "If I reach out my hand, it'll have a fist on the end of it, Frank. You were a dirty cop, and there's nothing worse in my book. But thanks for admitting your guilt."

Charlie slid off the stool. Frank turned around, grasped a bottle of whiskey by the neck, and said, "Sit down, Inspector."

Charlie's hackles rose. "Hold on, Frank," he warned.

"You'll sit down and drink more beer and you'll listen to what I have to say—or I'll bend this over your thick skull. To me you're no more than a watery-nosed opportunist who stepped on my dead body to climb onto my rank and pin on my badge. Do you sit or do I slug you?"

"Because it would do my record no good to be caught dead in this trap," Charlie said, "I'll listen rather than tangle with you."

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Frank drew another beer. "I made a mistake, Charlie. You remember those days. They were throwing money around like water. Alice was sick and a sick woman can be expensive. My pay wasn't enough, so I listened, and I filled my tin box. If you think that's an easy admission, think again. Then I got what was coming to me. I never complained, I never fought back, if you remember. I took what they handed me and when I was alone, I bought into this saloon. There's an old man whose name it's in, but it's really mine. I knew better than to apply for a license with the name that had been smeared as Detective-Captain Frank Denning."

"I'll look into the matter," Charlie promised. "And if it's legally possible to yank that license, I'll do it."

"It ain't," Frank said. "I made sure of that. Well, to get on with it, I lived quietly and pretty soon the stink went away and people forgot. Then, all of a sudden, I had a son who wanted to be a cop. All right—he is a cop, and he'll be the finest cop ever on this force. He'll climb right over you in rank, Charlie, even if you are an Inspector, because that boy's got something you and I never had. He's got brains. Brains instead of big feet and big muscles and a fat head. You can't deny he's made a record for himself."

Charlie sipped the beer which he wished he could complain about, but it was lively and cold and bitter, as it had been in the old days. He said, "On your tips, Frank. On your experience. On what your stool pigeons told you. No man ever had a better brood of pigeons than Captain Denning."

Frank threw the cloth on the shelf under the bar. "A cop is as good as his informants."

Charlie said, "I won't stand for my daughter marrying your son. The tin box was too big, Frank."

"Put down thirty cents, Inspector. You'd not be accepting a free drink from me if I was inclined to give you one. Then get out of here. You'll give the place a bad name."

Charlie finished the beer, put down his thirty cents, and went home. Fortunately, Ben and Susan were out, so he went to bed and didn't have to face them that night.

He thought about it the next day and came to no decision; but when Frank phoned he hung up on him and made up his mind. That night, he told Susan about it. She listened, impassively and without tears.

"Frank accepted bribes and admitted it to me last night. Ben is his son. Frank gave him the benefit of his training as a cop, and Frank provides him with valuable tips that have piled up a sensational record of important arrests. In other words, Ben is letting his old man pigeon for him."

"Ben is taking information his father gets at considerable risk, it seems to me," Susan said, "I can't see Frank Denning as a stool pigeon, no matter how much I try."

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"All right," Charlie said. "Maybe so, but Ben's gathering his glory from the work of someone else. What'll happen to Ben when Frank dies—or gets himself shot up, or is otherwise put out of circulation?"

"Is there any danger of that?" Susan asked.

"There is. Plenty! Ben'd be on the receiving end too."

She nodded, her blue eyes sparkling. "I was about to ask that. I'm going to marry Ben as soon as it's legally possible. I'll do it contrary to your wishes, against your orders, and even so I'll be expecting a wedding present from you."

Charlie's head bobbed up and down a couple of times. "I'm not to tell the lad?"

"You're not to make any trouble for his father. Because he'll be mine too, after we're married. I want to respect him, just as I want to respect you; but if you wreck Frank Denning, then my respect for him will be no less, while my respect for you will be gone. I love you very much, Pop, but you're fat-headed when it comes to forgiving anyone."

"Especially a crooked cop," Charlie said. "As crooked a cop as they ever came. Crooked from choice, and brazen enough to admit it."

Susan kissed him where his temple hair was receding with alarming swiftness. "Pop, whatever happens to Ben happens to me from now on. Being hurt by you will be ten times as painful as by anyone else, but I can take that too."

They did the dishes in an embarrassing silence at first, which they broke by a lot of silly talk meant to cover up emotions that were straining to explode.

Charlie was as surprised the next afternoon as he would have been if Susan had given in to him. Frank Denning came to Charlie's office. He walked right through the main office, and that must have cost him something. But he did come, and he sat down, and he was in no belligerent mood.

"I'm here for no favors," he said. "No more than you'd take from me, but I know what you're thinking. That the boy won't be able to stand on his own feet if he loses me. He can, Charlie. He's a better cop than you or I ever was and we were good in our day."

"You and your tin box," Charlie said, without feeling.

"And you and your slipshod methods," Frank said bitterly. "Mickey Dillon got himself sprung on bail. Since when can't a man of your rank stop that? And Mickey guessed the identity of the pigeon who's squealed. He's taking care of him, right after he takes care of Ben, whom he blames for buying the pigeon."

Charlie made one phone call to verify Mickey's release. Then he shook his head. "You're worried about the boy finding out the truth," Charlie said. "I'm worried because he's a cop, and I don't want a cop

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even threatened. I'll play your hand, if you got one, but when it's over we go back to where we are now."

Frank nodded. "Mickey'll play it direct. He'll wait around my place until Ben shows. I want a legal gun there, because I'm still trying to keep Ben from finding out. I guess that's all."

He walked out and Charlie admired him because he kept his chin up and he'd take the beating of contempt before he got out of the building.

Charlie arrived at the bar about nine thirty. He sat at the end of it and marveled at the people who came in. The stoolie type were so far in the minority as to be hard to spot, but the substantial people living here drank quietly, paid up, and went home. Frank clattered up and down the duckboards, dispensing his wares cheerfully and expertly.

Charlie had a feeling there wasn't a patron who didn't know about Frank's past, but they certainly didn't care. Of course, if they'd been cops . . . well, that would have made the difference.

From time to time he called his office, checking on the reports of the more than a hundred men he'd sent out to find Mickey. All were negative, so he knew Mickey was laying low until the right moment—and that would have to be tonight because his days of freedom were limited and he knew it.

Frank drifted over and they talked in low voices. "I close up at midnight," he said. "All my customers know this and usually leave by a quarter to, so that's when I expect Mickey to show. That's also when Ben comes off duty. Mickey'll be aware of it."

"Can't your pigeons help?" Charlie asked.

"Mickey passed the word and clipped their wings. They're grounded for the time being. I don't know where Mickey is, but I do know he'll hit soon."

"Even if we nail him, it'll make a big stink," Charlie warned. "If I wanted to, I couldn't keep your identity quiet."

Mickey came in with two friends, one long and thin, the other short and slightly built. The smaller one had the sawed-off shotgun and looked as if the kick of it would throw him clear through the big window. Except for them, the bar was now empty.

Charlie said, "Mickey, you're a dead man."

That bounced off Mickey like marbles. "Your kid buys my friends to find me and I don't like it. He was spotted four blocks away, just before I walked in. This won't take long."

Frank put both hands firmly on the bar so that Mickey could see them. "I bought that information, Mickey. Ben never knew where it came from."

Mickey shook his head. "It was big dough. More'n you'd have. It

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was city money and Ben bought my friends with it."

Frank said, "You know who I am, Mickey?"

"Sure—the cop's old man. I'm sorry for you."

"I used to be Captain Frank Denning. I was a cop—important brass, Mickey. I took bribes. Big ones. Great big bribes, and they nailed me. Remember?"

Mickey's face lighted up. "Yeah, I remember now. And you kept your mouth shut."

"I'm using the bribe money to buy information," Frank said. "They took away my badge and my reputation, but they didn't stop me from thinking like a cop, or using my son to do my work for me. I've been loaded with that money for years. I bought your friends, and under the right conditions I could buy you too."

"Good try," Mickey said, "but he's your son and you'd go to bat for him."

"The money—what's left of it—is right here," Frank said. "Money buys anything. It bought me, it bought your friends. Take what's left and go away and let my son alone."

Mickey's eyes glowed. "You know I could use dough, Frankie."

"A man needs money to keep hidden. How about it?"

"Let's see it," Mickey said, "then we'll talk."

Charlie guessed he had a few minutes left to live. He said, "Frank, he'll take the money and cross you."

"Shut up," Mickey warned. "You ain't much better'n Ben."

"I'll take the chance," Frank said. "I've got to."

He fetched the tin box from its hiding place, under the watchful eye and the menacing shotgun of Mickey's friend. There was more than twenty thousand left, all in bills no bigger than twenties. Mickey was deeply appreciative.

"I'll borrow it," he said, "but your kid is still Number One no-good on my list. I wonder what's keeping him?"

The swinging door to the back room burst open. The detectives who rushed in had synchronized their arrival with those who came in the front, led by Ben. The shotgun went off, but it was a reflex action, caused by the jerk of muscles when the bottle Frank threw hit the small man on the head.

Mickey made a last desperate try and came down under Ben's tackle. The thin one stared along the barrel of Charlie's service pistol and lost all appetite for anything violent.

As Ben explained later, he'd studied Mickey's record and method of operation until he could almost guess what he'd do, where and when. Directing a sizeable squad, he'd set it up, planted the men, let Mickey believe he was alone, and then moved in.

"Just good detective work," Frank told Charlie. "From a cop who can stand on his own feet."

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"I admit it," Charlie said. They were alone, after police cars arrived and cleaned out the place. "But those three goons are going to talk."

"It's been coming a long time," Frank said.

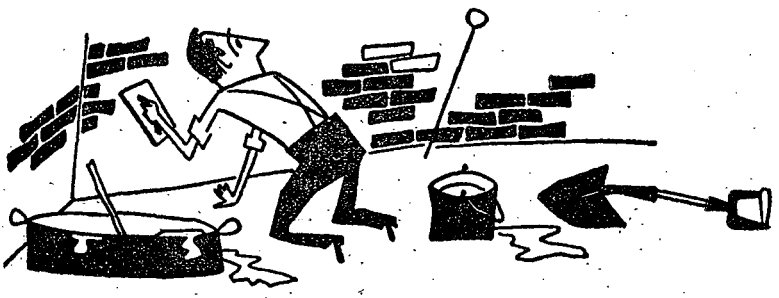
Charlie pushed the tin box across the bar. "Go buy yourself a pigeon," he said. "And draw me a beer. I might as well get used to the stuff, seeing we'll be related."

Frank drew two beers. "I'm just sorry for Ben. I wanted to keep it from him."

"Better tell him when he gets back from seeing Susie," Charlie said. "He'll read about it tomorrow." He tested his beer and nodded. "Do you still play a lousy game of checkers?"

Ben finished his apple pie, then kissed Susan. "It gets me," he said in a mildly complaining voice, "how those two ordinarily smart men could even think I didn't know about Dad. What kind of a detective do they figure I am, anyway?"

"I don't know," Susan said softly. Her face was too close to his. "I think you'll make a good husband. What else is important?"



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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

In praising the more unusual novels below, let me (and you) not overlook the services of the established series-detectives who are the backbone of the mystery novel. Many of them are at their best in recent books, especially Inspector West in John Creasey's THE TROUBLE AT SAXBY'S (Harper, $2.95), Inspector Finch in Margaret Erskine's A GRAVEYARD PLOT (Crime Club, $2.95), Brock (the Rock) Callahan in William Campbell Gault's COME DIE WITH ME (Random, $2.95), Joe Puma in Gault's SWEET WILD WENCH (Crest, 25¢), and Gibby Gibson in Hampton Stone's THE MAN WHO WAS THREE JUMPS AHEAD (Simon & Schuster, $2.95).

★★★★ **SCANDAL AT HIGH CHIMNEYS, *by John Dickson Carr*** (Harper, $3.50)
The purest formal detective story among Carr's grand historical thrillers, and a rich ripe picture of the more improper aspect of Victorian life. And don't miss the reprint of Carr's 1957 historical, FIRE, BURN! (Bantam, 35¢).

★★★★ **THE SLENDER THREAD, *by P. J. Merrill*** (Harcourt, Brace, $4.50)
Forceful yet sensitive tale of kidnaping and cruelty—a model of integrating suspense with deeper psychological values.

★★★★ **THE ENDLESS COLONNADE, *by Robert Harling*** (Putnam's, $3.50)
Underplayed thriller of love and peril in Italy—cumulatively exciting, visually evocative, subtly penetrating.

★★★ **A HERO FOR LEANDA, *by Andrew Garve*** (Harper, $2.95)
Sailboat rescues political exile from middle of Indian Ocean—splendid open-air adventure story, charming and sometimes startling.

★★★ **RUN FOR COVER, *by John Welcome*** (Knopf, $2.95)
An international-intrigue debutant with such an instinct for pace, economy, precision and conviction is welcome indeed.

Recent Ellery Queen reprints include THE DUTCH SHOE MYSTERY (1931; Pocket Books, 25¢), THE AMERICAN GUN MYSTERY (1933; Avon, 35¢), and two of my all-time favorite Queen cases: THE TRAGEDY OF Y (1932; Avon, 35¢) and THE FINISHING STROKE (1958; Cardinal, 35¢).

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **A. CONAN DOYLE**

TITLE: ***The Prisoner's Defense***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: World War I

COMMENTS: *A tale of the First World War—as perhaps only the creator of Sherlock Holmes could have written it. An old-fashioned story? Yes—bold-fashioned too, and gold-fashioned.*

THE CIRCUMSTANCES, SO FAR AS they were known to the public, concerning the death of the beautiful Miss Ena Garnier, and the fact that Captain John Fowler, the accused officer, had refused to defend himself on the occasion of the proceedings at the police court, had roused very general interest. This was increased by the statement that, though he withheld his defense, it would be found to be of a very novel and convincing character. The assertion of the prisoner's lawyer at the police court, to the effect that the answer to the charge was such that it could not yet be given, but would be available before the Assizes, also caused much speculation.

A final touch was given to the curiosity of the public when it was learned that the prisoner had refused all offers of legal assistance from counsel and was determined to conduct his own defense.

The case for the Crown was ably presented, and was generally considered to be a very damning one, since it showed very clearly that the accused was subject to fits of jealousy, and that he had already been guilty of some violence owing to this cause. The prisoner listened to the evidence without emotion, and neither interrupted nor cross-questioned the witnesses. Finally, on being informed that the time had come when he might address the jury, he stepped to the front of the

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dock. He was a man of striking appearance, swarthy, black-mustached, nervous, and virile, with a quietly confident manner. Taking a paper from his pocket he read the following statement, which made the deepest impression upon the crowded court:

I would wish to say, in the first place, gentlemen of the jury, that, owing to the generosity of my brother officers—for my own means are limited—I might have been defended today by the first talent of the Bar. The reason I have declined their assistance and have determined to fight my own case is not that I have any confidence in my own abilities or eloquence, but it is because I am convinced that a plain, straightforward tale, coming direct from the man who has been the tragic actor in this dreadful affair, will impress you more than any indirect statement could do.

If I had felt that I were guilty I should have asked for help. Since, in my own heart, I believe that I am innocent, I am pleading my own cause, feeling that my plain words of truth and reason will have more weight with you than the most learned and eloquent advocate. By the indulgence of the Court I have been permitted to put my remarks upon paper, so that I may reproduce certain conversations and be assured of saying neither more nor less than I mean.

It will be remembered that at the trial at the police court two months ago I refused to defend myself. This has been referred to today as a proof of my guilt. I said that it would be some days before I could open my mouth. This was taken at the time as a subterfuge.

Well, the days are over, and I am now able to make clear to you not only what took place, but also why it was impossible for me to give any explanation. I will tell you now exactly what I did and why it was that I did it. If you, my fellow-countrymen, think that I did wrong, I will make no complaint, but will suffer in silence any penalty which you may impose upon me.

I am a soldier of fifteen years' standing, a captain in the Second Breconshire Battalion. I have served in the South African Campaign and was mentioned in despatches after the battle of Diamond Hill. When the war broke out with Germany I was seconded from my regiment, and I was appointed as adjutant to the First Scottish Scouts, newly raised. The regiment was quartered at Radchurch, in Essex, where the men were placed partly in huts and were partly billeted upon the inhabitants. All the officers were billeted out, and my quarters were with Mr. Murreyfield, the local squire. It was there that I first met Miss Ena Garnier.

It may not seem proper at such a time and place as this that I should describe that lady. And yet her personality is the very essence of my

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case. Let me only say that I cannot believe that Nature ever put into female form a more exquisite combination of beauty and intelligence. She was twenty-five years of age, blonde and tall, with a peculiar delicacy of features and of expression.

I have read of people falling in love at first sight, and had always looked upon it as an expression of the novelist. And yet from the moment that I saw Ena Garnier, life held for me but the one ambition—that she should be mine. I had never dreamed before of the possibilities of passion that were within me. I will not enlarge upon the subject, but to make you understand my action—for I wish you to comprehend it, however much you may condemn it—you must realize that I was in the grip of a frantic elementary passion which made, for a time, the world and all that was in it seem a small thing—if I could but gain the love of this one girl.

And yet, in justice to myself, I will say that there was always one thing which I placed above her. That was my honor as a soldier and a gentleman. You will find it hard to believe this when I tell you what occurred, and yet—though for one moment I forgot myself—my whole legal offense consists of my desperate endeavor to retrieve what I had done.

I soon found that the lady was not insensible to the advances which I made to her. Her position in the household was a curious one. She had come a year before from Montpelier, in the South of France, in answer to an advertisement from the Murreyfields, in order to teach French to their three young children. She was, however, unpaid, so that she was rather a friendly guest than an employee.

She had always, as I gathered, been fond of the English and desirous to live in England, but the outbreak of the war had quickened her feelings into passionate attachment, for the ruling emotion of her soul was her hatred of the Germans. Her grandfather, as she told me, had been killed under very tragic circumstances in the campaign of 1870, and her two brothers were both in the French army. Her voice vibrated with passion when she spoke of the infamies of Belgium, and more than once I have seen her kissing my sword and my revolver because she hoped they would be used upon the enemy.

With such feelings in her heart it can be imagined that my wooing was not a difficult one. I should have been glad to marry her at once, but to this she would not consent. Everything was to come after the war, for it was necessary, she said, that I should go to Montpelier and meet her people, so that the French proprieties should be properly observed.

She had one accomplishment which was rare for a lady: she was a skilled motorcyclist. She had been fond of long, solitary rides, but after

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our engagement I was occasionally allowed to accompany her. She was a woman, however, of strange moods and fancies, which added in my feelings to the charm of her character. She could be tenderness itself, and she could be aloof and even harsh in her manner. More than once she had refused my company with no reason given, and with a quick, angry flash of her eyes when I asked for one. Then, perhaps, her mood would change and she would make up for this unkindness by some exquisite attention which would in an instant soothe all my ruffled feelings.

It was the same in the house. My military duties were so exacting that it was only in the evenings that I could hope to see her, and yet very often she remained in the little study which was used during the day for the children's lessons, and would tell me plainly that she wished to be alone. Then, when she saw that I was hurt by her caprice, she would laugh and apologize so sweetly for her rudeness that I was more her slave than ever.

Mention has been made of my jealous disposition, and it has been asserted at the trial that there were scenes owing to my jealousy, and that once Mrs. Murreyfield had to interfere. I admit that I was jealous. When a man loves with the whole strength of his soul it is impossible, I think, that he should be clear of jealousy. The girl was of a very independent spirit. I found that she knew many officers of Chelmsford and Colchester. She would disappear for hours together upon her motorcycle. There were questions about her past life which she would only answer with a smile unless they were closely pressed. Then the smile would become a frown.

Is it any wonder that I, with my whole nature vibrating with passionate, wholehearted love, was often torn by jealousy when I came upon those closed doors of her life which she was so determined not to open? Reason came at times and whispered how foolish it was that I should stake my whole life and soul upon one of whom I really knew nothing. Then came a wave of passion once more and reason was submerged.

I have spoken of the closed doors of her life. I was aware that a young, unmarried Frenchwoman has usually less liberty than her English sister. And yet in the case of this lady it continually came out in her conversation that she had seen and known much of the world. It was the more distressing to me as whenever she had made an observation which pointed to this she would afterwards, as I could plainly see, be annoyed by her own indiscretion, and endeavor to remove the impression by every means in her power.

We had several small quarrels on this account, when I asked questions to which I could get no answers, but they have been exagger-

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ated in the address for the prosecution. Too much has been made also of the intervention of Mrs. Murreyfield, though I admit that the quarrel was more serious upon that occasion.

It arose from my finding the photograph of a man upon her table, and her evident confusion when I asked her for some particulars about him. The name "H. Vardin" was written underneath—evidently an autograph. I was worried by the fact that this photograph had the frayed appearance of one which has been carried secretly about, as a girl might conceal the picture of her lover in her dress.

She absolutely refused to give me any information about him, save to make a statement which I found incredible, that it was a man whom she had never seen in her life. It was then that I forgot myself. I raised my voice and declared that I should know more about her life or that I should break with her, even if my own heart should be broken in the parting.

I was not violent, but Mrs. Murreyfield heard me from the passage, and came into the room to remonstrate. She was a kind, motherly person who took a sympathetic interest in our romance, and I remember that on this occasion she reproved me for my jealousy and finally persuaded me that I had been unreasonable, so that we became reconciled once more. Ena was so madly fascinating and I so hopelessly her slave that she could always draw me back, however much prudence and reason warned me to escape from her control.

I tried again and again to find out about this man Vardin, but was always met by the same assurance, which she repeated with every kind of solemn oath, that she had never seen the man in her life. Why she should carry about the photograph of a man—a young, somewhat sinister man, for I had observed him closely before she snatched the picture from my hand—was what she either could not, or would not, explain.

Then came the time for my leaving Radchurch. I had been appointed to a junior but very responsible post at the War office, which, of course, entailed my living in London. Even my week-ends found me engrossed with my work, but at last I had a few days' leave of absence. It is those few days which have ruined my life, which have brought me the most horrible experience that ever a man had to undergo, and have finally placed me here in the dock, pleading as I plead today for my life and my honor.

It is nearly five miles from the station to Radchurch. She was there to meet me. It was the first time that we had been reunited since I had put all my heart and my soul upon her. I cannot enlarge upon these matters, gentlemen. You will either be able to sympathize with and understand the emotions which over-

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balance a man at such a time, or you will not. If you have imagination, you will. If you have not, I can never hope to make you see more than the bare fact.

That bare fact, placed in the baldest language, is that during this drive from Radchurch Junction to the village I was led into the greatest indiscretion—the greatest dishonor, if you will—of my life. I told the woman a secret, an enormously important secret, which might affect the fate of the war and the lives of many thousands of men.

It was done before I knew it—before I grasped the way in which her quick brain could place various scattered hints together and weave them into one idea. She was wailing, almost weeping, over the fact that the allied armies were held up by the iron line of the Germans. I explained that it was more correct to say that our iron line was holding them up, since they were the invaders.

"But is France, is Belgium, *never* to be rid of them?" she cried. "Are we simply to sit in front of their trenches and be content to let them do what they will with ten provinces of France? Oh, Jack, Jack, for God's sake, say something to bring a little hope to my heart, for sometimes I think that it is breaking! You English are stolid. You can bear these things. But we others, we have more nerve, more soul! It is death to us. Tell me! Do tell me that there is hope! And yet it is foolish of me to ask, for, of course, you are only a subordinate at the War Office, and how should you know what is in the mind of your chiefs?"

"Well, as it happens, I know a good deal," I answered. "Don't fret, for we shall certainly get a move on soon."

"Soon! Next year may seem soon to some people."

"It's not next year."

"Must we wait another month?"

"Not even that."

She squeezed my hand in hers. "Oh, my darling boy, you have brought such joy to my heart! What suspense I shall live in now! I think a week of it would kill me."

"Well, perhaps it won't even be a week."

"And tell me," she went on, in her coaxing voice, "tell me just one thing, Jack. Just one, and I will trouble you no more. Is it our brave French soldiers who advance? Or is it your splendid Tommies? With whom will the honor lie?"

"With both."

"Glorious!" she cried. "I see it all. The attack will be at the point where the French and British lines join. Together they will rush forward on one glorious advance."

"No," I said. "They will not be together."

"But I understood you to say—of course, women know nothing of such matters, but I understood you to say that it would be a joint advance."

"Well, if the French advanced,

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we will say, at Verdun, and the British advanced at Ypres, even if they were hundreds of miles apart it would still be a joint advance."

"Ah, I see," she cried, clapping her hands with delight. "They would advance at both ends of the line, so that the Boches would not know which way to send their reserves."

"That is exactly the idea—a real advance at Verdun, and an enormous feint at Ypres."

Then suddenly a chill of doubt seized me. I can remember how I sprang back from her and looked hard into her face.

"I've told you too much!" I cried. "Can I trust you? I have been mad to say so much."

She was bitterly hurt by my words. That I should for a moment doubt her was more than she could bear.

"I would cut my tongue out, Jack, before I would tell any human being one word of what you have said."

So earnest was she that my fears died away. I felt that I could trust her utterly. Before we had reached Radchurch I had put the matter from my mind, and we were lost in our joy of the present and in our plans for the future.

I had a business message to deliver to Colonel Worral, who commanded a small camp at Pedley-Woodrow. I went there and was away for about two hours. When I returned I inquired for Miss Garnier, and was told by the maid that she had gone to her bedroom, and that she had asked the groom to bring her motorcycle to the door.

It seemed to me strange that she should arrange to go out alone when my visit was such a short one. I had gone into her little study to seek her, and here it was that I waited, for it opened on to the hall passage, and she could not pass without my seeing her.

There was a small table in the window of this room at which she used to write. I had seated myself beside this when my eyes fell upon a name written in her large, bold handwriting. It was a reversed impression upon the blotting paper which she had used, but there could be no difficulty in reading it. The name was Hubert Vardin.

Apparently it was part of the address of an envelope, for underneath I was able to distinguish the initials S.W., referring to a postal division of London, though the actual name of the street had not been clearly reproduced.

Then I knew for the first time that she was actually corresponding with this man whose vile, voluptuous face I had seen in the photograph with the frayed edges. She had clearly lied to me, too, for was it conceivable that she should correspond with a man whom she had never seen?

I don't desire to condone my conduct. Put yourself in my place. Imagine that you had my desperately

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fervid and jealous nature. You would have done what I did, for you could have done nothing else.

A wave of fury passed over me. I laid my hands upon the wooden desk. If it had been an iron safe I should have opened it. As it was, it literally flew to pieces before me. There lay the letter itself, placed under lock and key for safety, while the writer prepared to take it from the house.

I had no hesitation or scruple. I tore it open. Dishonorable, you will say, but when a man is frenzied with jealousy he hardly knows what he does. This woman, for whom I was ready to give everything, was either faithful to me or she was not. At any cost I would know which.

I could hardly bear to look at it.

A thrill of joy passed through me as my eyes fell upon the first words. I had wronged her. "Cher Monsieur Vardin." So the letter began. It was clearly a business letter, nothing else. I was about to replace it in the envelope with a thousand regrets in my mind for my want of faith when a single word at the bottom of the page caught my eyes, and I started as if I had been stung by an adder.

"Verdun"—that was the word. I looked again. "Ypres" was immediately below it. I sat down, horror-stricken, by the broken desk, and I read this letter, a translation of which I have in my hand:

Murreyfield House,
Radchurch

DEAR M. VARDIN,—Stringer has told me that he has kept you sufficiently informed as to Chelmsford and Colchester, so I have not troubled to write. They have moved the Midland Territorial Brigade and the heavy guns towards the coast near Cromer, but only for a time. It is for training, not embarkation.

And now for my great news, which I have straight from the War Office itself. Within a week there is to be a very severe attack from Verdun, which is to be supported by a holding attack at Ypres. It is all on a very large scale, and you must send off a special Dutch messenger to Von Starmer by the first boat. I hope to get the exact date and some further particulars from my informant tonight, but meanwhile you must act with energy.

I dare not post this here—you know what village postmasters are, so I am taking it into Colchester, where Stringer will include it with his own report which goes by hand. —Yours faithfully, SOPHIA HEFFNER.

I was stunned at first as I read this letter, and then a kind of cold, concentrated rage came over me. So this woman was a German and a spy! I thought of her hypocrisy and her treachery towards me, but, above all, I thought of the danger to the Army and the State. A great defeat, the death of thousands of

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men, might spring from my misplaced confidence.

There was still time, by judgment and energy, to stop this frightful evil. I heard her step upon the stairs outside, and an instant later she had come through the doorway. She started, and her face was bloodless as she saw me seated there with the open letter in my hand.

"How did you get that?" she gasped. "How dared you break my desk and steal my letter?"

I said nothing. I simply sat and looked at her and pondered what I should do. She suddenly sprang forward and tried to snatch the letter. I caught her wrist and pushed her down onto the sofa, where she lay, collapsed. Then I rang the bell, and told the maid that I must see Mr. Murreyfield at once.

He was a genial, elderly man, who had treated this woman with as much kindness as if she were his daughter. He was horrified at what I said. I could not show him the letter on account of the secret that it contained, but I made him understand that it was of desperate importance.

"What are we to do?" he asked. "I never could have imagined anything so dreadful. What would you advise us to do?"

"There is only one thing that we can do," I answered. "This woman must be arrested, and in the meanwhile we must so arrange matters that she cannot possibly communicate with anyone. For all we know, she has confederates in this very village. Can you undertake to hold her securely while I go to Colonel Worral at Pedley and get a warrant and a guard?"

"We can lock her in her bedroom."

"You need not trouble," said she. "I give you my word that I will stay where I am. I advise you to be careful, Captain Fowler. You've shown once before that you are liable to do things before you have thought of the consequence. If I am arrested all the world will know that you have given away the secrets that were confided to you. There is an end of your career, my friend. You can punish me, no doubt. What about yourself?"

"I think," said I, "you had best take her to her bedroom."

"Very good, if you wish it," said she, and followed us to the door.

When we reached the hall she suddenly broke away, dashed through the entrance, and made for her motorcycle, which was standing there. Before she could start we had both seized her. She stooped and made her teeth meet in Murreyfield's hand. With flashing eyes and tearing fingers she was as fierce as a wild cat at bay.

It was with some difficulty that we mastered her, and dragged her —almost carried her—up the stairs. We thrust her into her room and turned the key, while she screamed out abuse and beat upon the door inside.

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"It's a forty-foot drop into the garden," said Murreyfield, tying up his bleeding hand. "I'll wait here till you come back. I think we have the lady fairly safe."

"I have a revolver here," said I. "You should be armed." I slipped a couple of cartridges into it and held it out to him. "We can't afford to take chances. How do you know what friends she may have?"

"Thank you," said he. "I have a stick here and the gardener is within call. You hurry off for the guard."

Having taken, as it seemed to me, every possible precaution, I ran to give the alarm. It was two miles to Pedley, and the colonel was out, which occasioned some delay. Then there were formalities and a magistrate's signature to be obtained. A policeman was to serve the warrant, but a military escort was to be sent in to bring back the prisoner. I was so filled with anxiety and impatience that I could not wait, but I hurried back alone with the promise that they would follow.

The Pedley-Woodrow Road opens into the high-road to Colchester at a point about half a mile from the village of Radchurch. It was evening now and the light was such that one could not see more than twenty or thirty yards ahead. I had proceeded only a very short way from the point of junction when I heard, coming towards me, the roar of a motorcycle being ridden at a furious pace. It was without lights, and close upon me.

I sprang aside in order to avoid being ridden down, and in that instant, as the machine flashed by, I saw clearly the face of the rider. It was she—the woman whom I had loved. She was hatless, her hair streaming in the wind, her face glimmering white in the twilight, flying through the night like one of the Valkyries of her native land.

She was past me like a flash and tore on down the Colchester Road. In that instant I saw all that it would mean if she could reach the town. If she once was allowed to see her agent we might arrest him or her, but it would be too late. The news would have been passed on. The victory of the Allies and the lives of thousands of our soldiers were at stake.

Next instant I had pulled out the loaded revolver and fired two shots after the vanishing figure. I heard a scream, the crashing of the breaking cycle, and all was still.

I need not tell you more, gentlemen. You know the rest. When I ran forward I found her lying in the ditch. Both my bullets had struck her. One of them had penetrated her brain.

I was still standing beside her body when Murreyfield arrived, running breathlessly down the road. She had, it seemed, with great courage and activity scrambled down the ivy of the wall; only when he heard the whir of the motorcycle did he realize what had occurred.

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He was explaining it to my dazed brain when the police and soldiers arrived to arrest her. By the irony of fate it was me whom they arrested instead.

It was urged at the trial in the police court that jealousy was the cause of the crime. I did not deny it, nor did I put forward any witnesses to deny it. It was my desire that they should believe it. The hour of the French advance had not yet come and I could not defend myself without producing the letter which would reveal it.

But now it is over—gloriously over—and so my lips are unsealed at last. I confess my fault—my very grievous fault. But it is not that for which you are trying me. It is for murder. I should have thought myself the murderer of my own countrymen if I had let the woman pass.

These are the facts, gentlemen. I leave my future in your hands. If you should absolve me, I may say that I have hopes of serving my country in a fashion which will atone for this one great indiscretion, and will also, as I hope, end forever those terrible recollections which weigh me down. If you condemn me, I am ready to face whatever you may think fit to inflict.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Don Miguel de Cervantes, Detective***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Vallodolid, Spain

TIME: Early in the 17th century

COMMENT: *Another in the series of "Great Detectives," this one about the creator of Don Quixote—in which Cervantes, at the lowest point in his career, fights for his name, his family, his epic novel, and his very life . . .*

THE LATE TWILIGHT OF A SUMmer's evening had fallen over the ancient city of Vallodolid, and a warm breeze laden with the acrid dust of the surrounding plain blew fitfully through the twisting streets and into the open windows of the decrepit, three-story lodging house where the Cervantes family lived.

Don Miguel, now in his fifty-eighth year, was seated at a writing desk splattered with candle wax, thoughtfully turning the handwritten pages of the thick manuscript of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* with a worried frown upon his aquiline features. His usually gay eyes were dark with foreboding, his back, already heavy in build, seemed more stooped with the weight of despondency. He sighed and slowly lowered his broad forehead until it rested upon his folded hands.

Behind him his sharp-faced elder sister, Magdalena, stirred restlessly, her arms akimbo, her lips tensed thinly, as she looked disapprovingly out through the latticed window at the mean, narrow street full of bluish shadows.

"We have only twenty reals in the house, Miguel," Magdalena said at last. "What are we going to do when they are gone?"

"I will find another publisher."

"How can you? The moment the printer de Robles heard that the Duke of Bejar planned to withdraw his patronage from you, he sent back your novel. Unless the Duke gives you his patronage, no other printer will touch it."

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"Then I will find another patron."

"But you've lost two already! Oh, Miguel, would I not make twenty novenas if I though it could cause this black bird of malo suerte that has shadowed your life to fly away for once!"

"Perhaps it is not bad luck, Magdalena," Cervantes said gently. "Perhaps God is testing me in little ways, so I might be worthy at last of His greater favor and grace."

"Is it His wish that your family shall *starve?*"

"Magdalena!" Don Miguel's wife, Catalina, with flashing dark eyes that contrasted dramatically with her grey hair, entered from the kitchen and held up a warning finger. "You should be in Church praying, as a good beata should, not belaboring Miguel!"

"How can Miguel be so patient, so long-suffering?" Magdalena cried, throwing up her hands. "God has shown him no favor since the day he was born. Everything he touches turns to dust!"

Catalina, about to answer sharply, was diverted by sounds of light footsteps on the hallway stair, and then the door opened and a lithe, dark figure of a girl in her early twenties, carrying a basket of foodstuffs, slipped into the room. She was Cervantes' daughter, Isabel.

"El animal, villano!" she cried angrily, running to the window and peering down into the street. "A father was beating his son down there, pulling him along as if he were a burro, crying 'Come, Carlos, I beat you, Carlos!' "

"I hope you did not interfere," Catalina said gently.

"No, I did not, mama."

"Would that Miguel could be as passionate as his daughter against the injustices of the world!" Magdalena said pointedly. "Then perhaps fate would think again before striking him so often."

"Yes, indeed, he has bad luck to have *you* for a sister!" Catalina flared.

"Poor papa!" Isabel cried and ran to put her arms around him.

"No, wait." Cervantes rose with sudden animation. "Perhaps Isabel is right. There is a time to contend against injustice. I who fought at Lepanto should remember! It has just occurred to me what I must do. I will go at once to the palace of the Duke of Bejar. Tongues have been wagging against me. The story has been told that my Don Quixote ridicules the novel of Chivalry written by Bejar's own grandfather. But I shall confront the Duke with the story itself. I shall read aloud passages from it. If I can get him to *laugh,* then perhaps all will be well again."

"Yes, go at once, Miguel," Catalina said. "If only you can catch the Duke in time!"

Miguel fetched his hat quickly upon his head and strode in his heavily footed way towards the door.

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"I do not believe it," Magdalena said, standing at the kitchen door. "It is not God's will that you should ever have victory over your enemies. *Something* will stop you Miguel. You'll never get to the Duke's tonight!"

And having delivered this gloomy oracle, Magdalena left the room. A rueful smile appeared beneath Cervantes' big, silvered moustachios; then he kissed Catalina upon the forehead, gave Isabel a paternal bear hug, and went out of the chamber and down the stairs.

He was stopped almost at once, midway down the flight, by the sounds of violent quarrelling in the outside passageway beyond the vestibule door. He heard the cries and imprecations of two male voices, grunts and bumps against the panel, and the clash of metal armament. Apparently a duel to the death was in progress, not an unusual event upon the streets of Valladolid.

But the very intensity of the fight made Cervantes pause and finger the hilt of his sword uncertainly. His old days of soldiering, when he would have flung himself thoughtlessly into the fray, were long passed. Nevertheless, he shouted "Que pasa?" at the top of his voice, and descended slowly to the vestibule.

Outside the door a voice cried, "Vaya Vd!" Then the sounds of the fight diminished, as if the participants had maneuvered themselves into the street. By the time Cervantes opened the door the fight was over. The gloomy, tunnel-like passageway was clear, and at the end of it, like something seen in a telescope, Miguel beheld one of the combatants staggering out into the middle of the street from the opposite walk, his sword raised, and crying, "Coward! Coward!" From down the street to his left Miguel heard the peculiar hollow clicking of fleeing footsteps on the stony street.

The lone combatant began sinking to his knees, clutching his middle, and by the time Miguel reached his side the man had collapsed, lying slightly bent upon his back, his hand still gripping his sword, which shone stainless in the twilight. He was a young man, fair-haired, but with rather coarse and unattractive features.

Cervantes sighed and looked about him, wondering why others had not been drawn by the conflict. Then he understood why. Across the street from the entrance to his lodging house was one of Vallodolid's hedge taverns and he could hear the loud singing and carousing; an unbroken wall of thicket eight feet high ran the length of the street, separating passers-by from the revellers, and so effective a barrier was it that not even a glimmer of their lanterns could be seen, although their voices rose clearly in the summer dusk.

"What has happened, Don Miguel?" someone asked anxiously,

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and Miguel turned to see his friend, young Juan Podesta, assistant to de Robles the printer, approaching him silently. Cervantes noted automatically that Podesta came from the direction opposite the fleeing footsteps.

"There has been a duel and his opponent has fled."

"Is he dead?"

"He still breathes, I think. Let us take him to my chambers, and then we shall call the doctor and the alcalde."

As Podesta and Cervantes carried the limp body of the unconscious duellist into the lodging house, a ten-year-old boy met him at the door. The boy spread the alarm, running back up the stairs, crying shrilly "Un muerto! Un muerto!" By the time they arrived at Miguel's chambers, other inhabitants of the lodging house crowded about the doorway, excitedly spearing a gabble of strident questions into the room.

It was Magdalena who shoved the bolder of them away, sent one for a doctor, another for the alcalde, and then closed the door, folded her arms, and said distinctly, "I told you, Miguel, you would not get to the Duke!"

The doctor arrived first, a stout Asturian, and in his presence, surrounded by the Cervantes family, Juan Podesta, and a middle-aged widow, Teresa de Ayala, an aggressive busybody who had fought her way into the chamber over Magdalena's protestation, the duellist opened his eyes and stared around him.

"What is your name?" the doctor asked.

The man stared at him as if he had not all his wits, and said mechanically, "Don Gaspar de Ezpeleta, Knight of the noble Order of Santiago." Then he closed his eyes as if the effort of speaking had drained him.

"Don Gaspar," the doctor said urgently. Once again the eyes opened, but they still seemed out of focus. "Who wounded you?"

The veil of darkness was rent momentarily as de Ezpeleta became totally conscious. But he had time only to lift his head, as if searching for someone, blink once or twice at Don Miguel who stood in his line of vision at the foot of the bed, and utter a single word:

"Miguel!"

Then his head fell back upon the pillow and his eyes closed. Magdalena cried out at the horror of the clear accusation, while Catalina moved protectively to one side of Don Miguel and Isabel moved to the other.

The doctor sought de Ezpeleta's pulse, and after a moment, flashing a suspicious glance at Cervantes, he said quickly, "He is dead. This is now a matter for the alcalde." And with that he left the chamber.

Miguel knew from the moment his eyes met the unflinching stare of

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the alcalde, Diego de Villarroel, that with words yet unspoken, paths yet uncrossed, here stood a mortal enemy. He could not, of course, know that the red-haired, ramrod-figured administrator, with his hollow-cheeked, ascetic face and bloodless lips, had disowned his eldest son for becoming a painter, for consorting in taverns with other artists and poets; that he was a hater of all art, especially that of writing, because in the printed, secular word, so easily available to the many, might lurk heresy that could escape even the most penetrating analysis. He was aware the writer Cervantes lived within his district, although he had never met him, and to hate him now was practically an article of faith.

"Out of his own dying mouth, Don Gaspar accused you," he said to Miguel in a hard voice.

"But I have never seen this man before, Alcalde!"

"I have already talked with the others in the house," Villarroel said. "Is it not strange that they heard nothing of the fight, that it was only *you* who discovered it?"

"I was on the stairs while the two were fighting in the passageway, Alcalde. Outside there was much noise from the hedge tavern and this sound covered the duel. See my sword—" Miguel drew his blade and held it out to the alcalde. "There is no stain upon it."

"That means nothing," the administrator said coolly.

"Don Miguel did not kill him," young Juan Podesta spoke up, the color of his handsome face deepening with indignation. "I saw him walk into the street and stand over Don Gaspar. I did not hear the footsteps, but I saw his sword was sheathed. He would have had no time to clean his blade, for we carried Don Gaspar at once to this apartment."

The alcalde turned angrily upon Podesta. "And what were you doing upon the street just then?"

"I was coming to visit Don Miguel. My employer, Don Francisco de Robles, had been going to print Don Miguel's novel. We had business to discuss."

"He doesn't speak the truth!" the widow de Ayala cried out, her malicious eyes flashing. "He comes here to visit Don Miguel's daughter, Isabel!"

"Is that true?" Villarroel demanded.

"Well, yes, I—"

"And what is wrong with that, Alcalde?" Isabel spoke up spiritedly. "Juan comes with my father's permission."

"Don Miguel gives many 'permissions!'" the widow said again spitefully. "Senorita Isabel has many suitors who come here, Alcalde. There are men visitors coming here night after night to see her! It is shameful!"

"That is not right, Senora de Ayala," Miguel spoke up. "I have many acquaintances, it is true, men

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who write poems and plays, and they often come here to see me. Please, Senora, because you are a lonely woman, do not resent the sociability of others!"

The widow gave a spitting sound and folded her arms defensively.

"Perhaps Don Gaspar was one of your visitors?" Villarroel said slyly.

"I tell you I have never seen him before.

"And perhaps you did not approve of his attentions to your daughter?"

"That is not true!"

"But it does give you a reason for killing Don Gaspar. And he *did* call out your name!"

"Miguel is not an uncommon name, Alcalde. Perhaps there is another Miguel hereabouts."

"Is there?" Villarroel asked the widow Ayala smoothly.

"Not here," she replied with a brightening of her eyes.

"Wait," Miguel said. "A new lodger moved in just this morning —a Senorita Ramirez. She now lives on the top floor, I believe. Perhaps Don Gaspar was her friend, and she could tell us something."

Again the widow Ayala spoke up triumphantly. "I saw Senorita Ramirez standing at the door there, when you carried Don Gaspar to the bed. She saw his face, yet she did not come in to grieve!"

"Perhaps, at least, you would ask her, Alcalde," Miguel said, trying to hide the desperation that was rising in him.

"Of course," Villarroel said, smiling bleakly. "We must give you every chance to clear yourself . . ."

Mariana Ramirez was a young, attractive brunette, slight-figured but well formed, dressed in black with a long black lace scarf over her head, as if she were about to go upon the street.

"Do you know this man?" Villarroel asked, pointing to the figure upon the bed.

"No, no!" she said, looking away, and her slim fingers in which she held a prayer book tightened until the volume curled. "I saw him when they brought him in. I do not know him."

"And do you have any friends called Miguel?"

Mariana Ramirez took a deep breath, then looked up with clear, guileless brown eyes and said sweetly, "No, Senor Villarroel."

"Ah, you know my name." The administrator was pleased.

"It is well known that the Alcalde always succeeds in catching the criminal."

"That is charming of you, Senorita. You are a newcomer to Valladolid? You speak with a Murcian accent."

"I come from Cartagena originally. But I have lived here for several years with my parents near the Plaza del Azoquejo. But they are dead now, and I am alone."

"Not completely, I hope."

A slight flush rose to the girl's

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cheek. "I was on my way to San Pablo's—" she began.

"Then we shall not keep you from your prayers," Villarroel said with restrained gallantry. "Buenas noches, Senorita."

Miguel watched her leave, having observed that during all the florid exchange with the alcalde the girl had not relaxed her hold upon her prayer book. He believed she might be going to the cathedral, but doubted if it were only to pray. . . . The next moment the stern voice of the alcalde brought him rudely out of his speculations.

"You will come to the city jail with me, Don Miguel de Cervantes. There is much here that remains to be explained. I will have my polizantes remove the body from your chambers at once. Come."

Catalina threw her arms around Miguel with a cry of despair while Isabel clung to him from the other side. Magdalena stood white-lipped, shaking her head, and Miguel guessed shrewdly what was in her mind. Widow Ayala appeared highly gratified.

"Look after things here, Juan," Miguel said shakily to Podesta, placing a hand upon his shoulder.

"You may depend upon me," Podesta said. "I will ask de Robles for his lawyer on your behalf."

Miguel did not know then why he did it, but after he put on his hat he picked up the manuscript and stuffed it under his arm. As he turned to go, he saw his sister raise her arm and deliver a ringing slap with her open hand across the pallid cheek of Senora de Ayala. The widow screamed, and holding her face, ran out through the door which Villarroel now held open. The alcalde frowned at Miguel as if it were he who had delivered the chastisement.

"Come," he said sternly.

As Miguel walked down the dark and twisted streets with two polizantes, one on either side of him, and Villarroel in the lead, the words of his sister came back to him. Certainly the black bird of malo suerte had perched once again upon his shoulders. Or had he ever been free of it?

Beginning at the Battle of Lepanto, where he lost the use of his left hand, his bad luck had never ceased: capture and imprisonment by Turkish pirates for five years; failure at soldiering because the King spurned his supplications; failure at playwriting because Lope de Vega monopolized the stage with his own plays; failure at tax gathering, because he was not cut out for it; and imprisonment for his fumbling at the hands of the King he tried faithfully to serve.

And now, when he was ready to fight back, to go to the Duke of Bejar and plead his cause in behalf of his life's work—this manuscript he carried—his evil fortune stepped in again and he was accused of murder!

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You must not go with Villarroel! A voice inside him spoke so clearly that Miguel was startled. He felt fear and anger stir, and rebellion, and was surprised. Always before he had met his fortune with shoulder-shrugging resignation and good nature. But now—

If you follow Villarroel passively now, he will lead you to the gallows! The inner voice spoke clearly again. And suddenly Miguel knew —as certainly as that his eyes beheld a misshapen moon over the black chimney pots of the tiled roofs of Vallodolid—that he must escape!

His opportunity came very soon —as his guards led him beneath the tower of Sta. Maria de Antigua and past the adjoining cloisters with their rounded arches, through which, deep in shadow, appeared fountains, hedges, and a network of pathways.

Now abreast a wall, Miguel gave a sudden tremendous push with his great arms to the polizantes on both sides of him, and so completely had his former submissiveness deceived them that his attack caught them wholly unprepared. One caromed off the wall while the other staggered into the street, and by the time they had regained their balance Miguel had fled into the dark sanctuary of the garden.

The outcry was instantaneous, Villarroel's voice raised hysterically above the others; but so well did Miguel know the intricacies of the pathways—having walked them often during his literary gestative periods—it was only a matter of moments before the sounds of chase faded. But Miguel did not stop. He crossed a street and ran panting along the southern, treed fringe of the Plaza Mayor, back in the direction from which the polizantes had led him. But he dared not return to his lodgings. It would be the first place Villarroel would go to find him. Where then?

It was then that Miguel knew that part of his mind had been making plans all along. Where else should he go but to the church of San Pablo, where Mariana Ramirez said she was going, and where he'd already decided she was not going only to pray?

The cathedral reared massively skyward, and Miguel stopping to look up out of pure habit saw the spires point portentously at the stars shining dimly through the cloud of dust that hovers perpetually over the Castilian plain. Legs trembling from unaccustomed exertion, Miguel crossed the broad stone walk, past the oil-soaked faggot that burned smokily in an embrasure, up the steep steps, and into the cool, candlelit vestibule. Without conscious volition he dipped his fingers into the basin of holy water, made the sign of the cross, and then with extreme caution opened the door to the nave.

Mariana was kneeling alone in a

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pew half-way down the aisle, and so silently did Miguel slip into a shadowed seat at the back that she did not even turn her head. Miguel's heart skipped a beat. Had the friend he was certain she had come to meet already come and gone? No, there had scarcely been time enough for that. What if she had really come here only to pray, as she said?

Miguel laid the manuscript of *Don Quijote* upon the seat beside him and clasped his hands. *Let not this endeavor come to naught.*

Mariana sat motionless for a long time, while other Vallodolidians came and went, and then just as Miguel began to lose heart, a large young man strode down the aisle, and after genuflecting, slid into the seat beside her.

At once Mariana became animated. Even from where he sat, Miguel could hear the excited sibilance of her whisperings. He had no doubt she was telling him of the murder of de Ezpeleta and of her exchange with Villarroel.

The young man nodded thoughtfully during her recital, and then after a while he held his fingers to her lips and began speaking softly in return. As he spoke, Miguel saw Mariana stiffen, slide a little away from him, and press the fingers of both hands against her lips.

Was he horrifying her with the details of his crime?

Then Mariana did a totally unexpected thing. She let out a little cry which echoed pathetically in the cavernous nave, rose hurriedly, and stumbled into the aisle without remembering to genuflect. As she rushed past him towards the doors, Miguel saw that her face was twisted with grief, as if she'd just seen her loved one die before her eyes.

The big young man followed her now, but slowly, as if he had no intention of catching up with her, and by the time he had stepped outside the church Miguel was directly behind him, his manuscript again under his arm, his sword unsheathed and ready. Miguel pressed the point suddenly into the small of the man's back, and then stepped quickly away. The man whirled to face him.

"Is your name Miguel?" Cervantes demanded.

"Yes. Miguel de Vargas. But why, Senor, do you attack me? I am unarmed, as you see."

Miguel made an imperative gesture towards a bench in the shadows near the wall, and Vargas, a swarthy, good-looking young fellow with a reflective cast to his features, went to it and sat down.

"I cannot expect you to admit your crime to me," Miguel said, standing alertly over Vargas. "But I have been accused of it. My name, too, is Miguel, and Don Gaspar died with that name upon his lips."

"Yes, I know," Vargas said quietly. "Mariana just told me about it. I'm sorry you were implicated."

Cervantes frowned.

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"You do not deny that it was *you* whom Don Gaspar meant!"

"No. He meant me. But I did not kill him."

"I'm afraid you'll have to prove that to the alcalde. You will come with me!"

Vargas smiled sadly. "It will do you no good to turn me in, Senor. I can prove where I was when the murder took place."

Miguel hesitated. If he turned Vargas over to Villarroel and Vargas made good his boast, he, Cervantes, would be even worse off than he was before his escape.

"Can you prove it to me—now?"

"Yes. There is Father Alverado on the steps—he will tell you. Father!"

As the priest came towards them, his cassock thrown back in the warm night, Miguel sheathed his sword and suddenly felt spent and ineffectual.

"Father, will you tell this gentleman where I have been all afternoon and evening, up to about ten minutes ago?"

"Why, Miguel has been with me all that time," the priest said.

"Father Alverado has been giving me instructions—for, you see, I plan to enter the priesthood."

"Then that is why Mariana was so shocked and tearful, and ran from the church!" Miguel said, startled.

"Exactly. I had kept my decision a secret from her until tonight. We were going to be married."

"But why should Don Gaspar name you as his murderer, when you were nowhere near?"

"Because he was a passionately possessive and revengeful man. Doubtless another of Mariana's numerous and unsuccessful suitors challenged him, and when he wounded Don Gaspar mortally, Don Gaspar called out my name, because he knew that Mariana and I were to be married. It was in keeping with his character that he should try to deny me what he thought was my greatest desire."

"But you mention other suitors!" Miguel cried aghast. "Were there many?"

"Mariana is the kind of woman who attracts and distracts men in great numbers," Vargas said with a sigh. "I could name at least a half dozen."

"But I have no *time* to investigate so many!" Miguel cried hopelessly, and sank down upon the bench.

"You are in trouble?" the priest asked gently.

"I am a fugitive from the law, Father, but I am innocent," Miguel said hoarsely, and then explained what had happened.

When he was finished, the priest said thoughtfully, "Perhaps you should spend the night here in the church. No one will bother you. Then in the morning it might be given you to know what you must do."

"You cannot go home," Vargas said. "It would be better than wan-

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dering all night upon the streets."

"Very well," Miguel said. "Thank you, Father. I will do as you suggest."

The next morning at ten o'clock Miguel stopped at a fonda on the outskirts of Vallodolid to have breakfast. It was a poor repast, consisting of a bony piece of salt fish and bread as moldy and brown as ancient armor; but Miguel ate scarcely aware of what he was doing since his heart was high and his mind now full of purpose. It had come to him the night before, as he lay upon the pew in the church, what his course must be.

He had little hope that Villarroel would carry on a vigorous investigation in his behalf unless Cervantes had the backing, the good will, and the patronage of someone in a high position—someone like the Duke of Bejar. He would go through with his original plan—to read excerpts from *Don Quijote* to the Duke, and if he could move the Duke to laughter—Then not only might the Duke help him to publish his book, he might also see to it that Villarroel did not rest sluggishly on his personal conviction of Cervantes' guilt. Laughter had as often won men to a cause as tears.

Therefore Miguel betook himself after breakfast to the Duke's palatial town house and was presently ushered by haughty guardians into the ducal presence. Already at midmorning, the Duke of Bejar sat at a long refectory table in a great hall conducting his affairs of the day; attendants and flunkies made a great stir running to and fro, agents and favor-seekers stood in little knots holding excited and many-gestured conversations, while flatterers vied for attention around the Duke's own table.

"Yes, Miguel de Cervantes, what is your business?" the Grandee asked crisply, his feathered pen held in impatient abeyance over a parchment document. He was a small man, dark, with shrewd eyes and spare, handsome features.

"I have to come to ask Your Grace to reconsider his withdrawal of patronage from the publication of my book, *Don Quijote de la Mancha.*"

The Duke threw down his pen with an angry gesture.

"I should not have thought you would have the effrontery to ask to dedicate your book to me when it is a patent mockery of the literary labours of my own grandfather!"

"That is not true, Your Grace," Miguel said with heartfelt sincerity. "I could not sink so low as to criticize the style of your eminent grandfather. My book is impudent, they say, and irreverent too—but it mocks only a florid and romantic style which has become *universally* decadent. I beg Your Grace to permit me to read you a few passages from my novel, that you may hear with your own ears the kind of work it is."

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"Very well," said the Grandee. "I must admit I've been curious to hear it. But you must read it here and now!"

"I have come prepared, Your Grace."

The Duke struck the table with the hilt of his short sword and called out, "Hear, hear! Miguel de Cervantes will read from his own work!" There was a sly light in the Duke's eyes, as if he expected Miguel to make a fool of himself.

Cervantes had his selections ready, and when the last whisper in the hall had died out, he started reading aloud, in a full-ch[illegible]ted, and spirited way, the episode near the end of the novel in which Don Quixote, standing upon the saddle of Rozinante, thrusts his hand into a dark window and Maritornes slips a noose of rope over his wrist, thereby imprisoning him.

At first there was a dead silence, and Cervantes, looking up occasionally, discovered the Duke listening intently, and saw that the eye of every flatterer was upon the Grandee, waiting for his cue. If the Duke laughed, they would laugh; if he scorned, they would scorn. Presently the Duke smiled, and his smile was reflected all around the hall. Then when Miguel read how Rozinante ran off, leaving Quixote dangling from the window, the nobleman laughed long and loud, and instantly so great a roar went up all about that Miguel was obliged to pause.

"Read more, Cervantes," the Duke said, wiping his eyes with a lace-edged handkerchief. "Read more!"

Miguel read another selection, and yet another, and all the time the laughter grew until Miguel had to stop every few seconds while the sound subsided. As his last excerpt, he read the scene in which Don Quixote attacks the merchants of Toledo on their way to buy silks in Murcia.

"There were six merchants in all," Miguel read, "all on horseback and every one screened with an umbrella, besides four servants and three muleteers[1] on foot. Don Quixote no sooner perceived them than he closed his eyes the better to visualize his enemies, and at once the hoof beats upon the hard, sun-baked earth became the steps of a dragon, the hollow drumming of the wooden clogs worn by the muleteers became the chomping of its giant teeth, and the slurred scrape of the servants' hempen-soled alpargatas the drag of its heavy tail."

Miguel stopped reading suddenly as his breath caught in his throat. How incredible it was! Here—*in the lines of his own novel*—appeared a fact that provided the answer to the question that had tortured him since last night. Who had killed Don Gaspar de Ezpeleta? He knew the answer now. It

[1] Mule boys conducted travelers through Spain, brought back the mules, and took care of them all the way.

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lay before him. But would anybody believe him?

A concerted buzzing brought him to himself, and looking up he saw, standing in the doorway of the great hall, the tall, fanatical figure of the alcalde, Diego de Villarroel, backed by half a dozen uniformed polizantes.

"Well, Alcalde?" the Duke asked sharply, apparently annoyed by the official intrusion.

"With Your Grace's permission," Villarroel said, "we have come to take this man, Miguel de Cervantes, into custody."

"What has he done?"

"Murder, Your Grace!"

"No!" Miguel cried loudly. "I did no murder!"

The alcalde gave a signal to the polizantes and they advanced to apprehend Miguel.

"Stop!" the Duke cried. The polizantes appeared bewildered, but they halted and glanced back at Villarroel.

The Duke looked at Miguel with friendly, questioning eyes. "I like your novel, Don Miguel. You have the gift of God to be able to make men laugh as you have done today. Certainly I find it difficult to believe that a man with such a gift should be capable of murder. Have you anything to say to me?"

"Yes, Your Grace. I need your help. Two things I would desire."

"Name them."

"One, that I may dedicate my book to Your Grace."

"Granted. Provided, of course, that you are, as you say, innocent. And the second?"

"I know who killed the man I am accused of murdering. But I need help on the outside. If I can prove to Your Grace's satisfaction that I am innocent, will Your Grace have done the things that are necessary to clear my name?"

"I will indeed. And you may confide your knowledge to me while the alcalde waits. Upon my honor—" the Duke raised his hand towards Villarroel, "I shall return Miguel de Cervantes into your custody as soon as he has spoken to me!"

At that the Duke of Bejar drew Miguel into an antechamber where Miguel spoke quickly and to the point, and the Duke listened with the air of one disposed to do all that was needed . . .

Miguel was placed in a gloomy cell at the city jail at twelve o'clock noon. The Duke's agents worked fast, and by four o'clock they returned to their master with the evidence Miguel predicted they would find. At five o'clock the Duke himself appeared at the jail, and Villarroel, kept purposely ignorant of the Duke's discoveries, went at once to Miguel's cell.

"I do not understand what unholy power you have to make the Duke do your bidding," he said churlishly, "but His Grace is here and insists that you be allowed to

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proceed according to your own plan. But I warn you, sirrah, if you fail to prove your innocence, *I* will have *my* word, and it will not be pleasant!"

"I do hope the black bird is gone at last from my shoulder," Cervantes said fervently.

Whereupon a jailer opened the cell door and Miguel was escorted down a steep flight of stone steps to a damp underground chamber where a group of people were gathered silently about a slab upon which rested a still, sheeted figure.

"My poor Miguel!" Catalina threw her arms around him. His whole family was there—Catalina, Isabel, Magdalena. There was Juan Podesta, too, who stepped forward and said earnestly, "I told de Robles about you, and he has set his lawyer to work."

"Thank you, Juan," Miguel said. "But His Grace, the Duke of Bejar, has come here to help me." He bowed in the nobleman's direction, and the Grandee returned the bow with a sombre smile.

At the foot of the corpse stood Mariana Ramirez, looking down white-faced at the silent figure. At one side, Miguel de Vargas stood quietly, his hands folded respectfully in front of him.

"Well, suppose you make your accusation," Villarroel said harshly.

"In my own time, Alcalde," Miguel replied. Senorita Ramirez, last night you said you did not know the man beneath this sheet. It is Don Gaspar de Ezpeleta. Do you know him now?"

"Yes, I know him," Mariana said in a low voice.

"Did he not ask you to marry him many times?"

"Yes."

"But you refused him in favor of Miguel de Vargas, who stands there. Is that not true?"

"Yes."

"And was not Don Gaspar, may his soul rest in peace, a violent and revengeful man?"

"Yes, he was."

"So revengeful, in fact, that he would do *anything* to stop your marriage to Miguel?"

"Yes?"

"Tell us who murdered Don Gaspar!" Villarroel said savagely.

Miguel leaned forward, and grasping the corner of the sheet he threw it back to reveal the ashen face of the dead knight.

"Don Gaspar himself is the murderer! He committed suicide with the sole intention of fastening the crime upon Miguel de Vargas!"

"But his sword was clean!" Villaroel cried. "And there was no other weapon found."

At a nod from Miguel the Duke raised his hand and one of his attendants stepped forward, holding out a sharp, bloodstained short sword.

"Here it is," Miguel said, holding it out to the alcalde. "Don Gaspar pretended to fight with an opponent, stabbed himself, then thrust

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the sword into the hedge that surrounds the tavern. Then he staggered to the center of the street and collapsed."

"But you spoke of footsteps running away," Villarroel said. "You yourself said you heard the murderer who fled."

"Yes, but it was not a murderer who ran. It was an unwilling accomplice."

"Who?"

At another signal an attendant came into the chamber leading a dirty, white-faced boy in a sackcloth tunic with wooden clogs upon his feet.

"Your name?"

"Carlos Barca, Senor."

"You know this man?" Miguel asked, pointing at Don Gaspar.

The boy trembled. "Yes, Senor."

"Tell us about him."

"He picked me up in la Plaza Mayor yesterday evening and said he wanted me to do a job for him. I went with him, but when we came to the narrow street I got afraid. I tried to run away. He seized me and hit me. He dragged me along and trapped me in the passageway of a building. He made great sounds with a sword and with his voice, as if he would kill me. Then—"

Miguel interrupted.

"When he heard me coming and call out 'Que pasa?' behind the door he cried to you, 'Vaya!' 'Go!' Is that not so?"

"Yes, Senor. And I ran away very much afraid."

"This boy is a muleteer," Miguel said. "Notice the clogs he wears upon his feet. As he ran down the street, I noted the peculiar sound they made upon the stones, but I did not recognize it then. A moment later Juan Podesta walked up making no sound at all. Not until I read my own account of Don Quixote's meeting with the merchants and the muleteers, and my own description of the special sound the clogs made, did I remember everything and see the solution to the mystery. Even that my own daughter had observed from a distance Don Gaspar strike the boy in the street, heard him call the boy Carlos, and concluded that it was a father striking his son. When I identified the *sound,* the whole picture became clear."

A heavy silence fell among them when he finished.

"If you had not written *Don Quijote,*" the Duke said, "perhaps you would have died for a murder you did not commit."

"Yes, Your Grace," Cervantes said. "I think I am a very lucky man." And he brushed his shoulder gratefully, as if he now knew the black bird of malo suerte were gone for ever.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOHN COLLIER**

TITLE: ***A Matter of Taste***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Sir Barnard Wigmore and Scotland Yard

LOCALE: London

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A matter of that old standby, "the perfect crime," with a modus operandi wonderful to behold . . . a delicious dessert in the menu of murder, as concocted by a master chef.*

SMALL AND EXCLUSIVE AS IT IS, the Medusa is unquestionably the best-known of London clubs. It is there, on the first Friday of each month, a circle of intimates gathers, whose pleasure it is, after enjoying an admirably cooked dinner accompanied by well-chosen wines, to retire to the smoking room and discuss the more interesting of the murders they have happened upon in the interval since last they met.

The circle is well constituted for its purpose. Its regular members include a leading barrister, a well-known criminologist, a famous explorer, an eminent psychiatrist who makes a specialty of the homicidal impulse, and an amiable nonentity whose simple utterances are not always unworthy of attention. Others are now and then invited to join the group—a detective-inspector from the Yard, a country parson, an Egyptologist (for asps), a distinguished savant (for general purposes), and, on occasional gala nights, a murderer in person.

One evening not long ago, the circle was in full session. The servants had removed the coffee cups, placed every man's favorite beverage at his elbow, subdued the lights, and noiselessly withdrawn.

"I wonder," said the nonentity amiably, "if there really is such a thing as 'the perfect murder'?"

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This started the ball rolling with a vengeance. The explorer expatiated on the polar poniard, or ice dagger, which has the advantage of melting away and leaving no trace of a weapon. The psychiatrist, contemptuous of all material agents, described methods of inducing suicidal mania in unwanted spouse or obstructive uncle. A celebrated mycologist who was present gave a short, interesting talk on the non-edible fungi, their use and abuse.

"All this, however, is purely theoretical," observed the amiable nonentity. "Can't we get down to cases?"

"You are right, Smithers," said a voice that had not been heard for some time in the little symposium. It was that of Sir Barnard Wigmore, consulting pathologist to Her Majesty's Home Office, who had been away for several months taking the cure at a famous Continental spa. "It is only to be expected, of course, that the perfect murder will be concealed from our sight in the very brightness of its own perfection. It so happens, however, that just before my recent indisposition I was called on by the Yard in connection with a case that was not only unique in my own limited experience but that possibly has no parallel in the entire annals of crime. I wonder if you fellows would care to hear about it?"

Needless to say, a general murmur of assent greeted this inquiry.

"Very well," continued Sir Barnard, first taking a sip from a glass of effervescent liver salts that stood beside him. "Since we are all friends, and since no whisper of what passes here is ever allowed to reach the ears of a public already overaddicted to sensationalism, I shall not attempt to disguise the personalities involved.

"The case was that of Lady Jerningham, who died so suddenly last spring. Whether by an indiscretion on the part of her doctor or through the gossip of the servants, her symptoms became generally known and were widely discussed. They included acute abdominal discomfort, nausea, dizziness, spots before the eyes, and, finally, convulsions, syncope, and coma. Death supervened in less than twelve hours.

"I need hardly remind you, gentlemen, that while symptoms such as these are exhibited in various quite ordinary forms of violent gastric disturbance, and particularly in cases of food poisoning of an innocent nature, they are also typical of the effects of many types of irritant poisons criminally administered. In view of certain corollary circumstances that were a matter of common knowledge, rumor was rife in the clubs, and suspicion fastened upon Sir Jervase Jerningham, eleventh baronet of that name, and husband of the unfortunate lady in question. It is generally known that Lady Jerning-

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ham was several years older than her husband, and it was a matter of frequent debate as to whether her appearence or her personality was the more unfortunate.

"Moreover, immediately before her seizure Sir Jervase had presented her with an unusually large box of chocolates. This box, its contents about two-thirds consumed, was found in the unfortunate lady's boudoir, and preserved by the butler—to quote him—'Just in case'!

"It is not uncommon for a husband to present a box of chocolates to his wife. I have done so myself; those of you who are married have doubtless also made such trifling gifts, and with motives as innocent as my own. But there is a very widespread opinion that in instances where the wife is so conspicuously lacking in feminine charm as to be unlikely to inspire any such gallant generosity in her spouse, such gifts may be suspected as indications of a guilt feeling, such as is experienced even by the most cynical in connection with an act of infidelity. I think our eminent psychiatrical friend will probably confirm the prevalence, if not the validity, of this opinion."

The eminent psychiatrist having nodded, Sir Barnard resumed his narrative. "Now, at that time the name of Sir Jervase was linked by wagging tongues to that of the celebrated film star Miss Gloria Street, whom, as you probably know, he has recently married. Miss Street is a young lady of outstanding attractions, and this was an outstandingly large box of chocolates, weighing, in fact, no less than fifteen pounds. It was very generally assumed that Sir Jervase had, so to speak, killed two birds with one stone, wiping out both guilt feeling and wife with the same expiatory offering. The daily press was alert to capitalize on the sensation and, in capitals, exhorted Scotland Yard to 'GET A MOVE ON.'

"Our omniscient journalists were not aware that Scotland Yard had moved already. The Commissioner was fully cognizant of the marital situation of the Jerninghams, and I am revealing only the most open of secrets in telling you that his eye—gallant, as befits an old soldier—had rested with particular attention on Miss Street. That same eye—keen, as befits a chief of police—had observed with some distaste her sudden involvement with Sir Jervase. The Commissioner was out to get his man, and he immediately summoned me to the Yard. The box of chocolates, of which only a third remained, had been brought in and placed upon his desk.

"'We have,' said he, 'corpse, chocolates, and motive. In fact, we have two motives. Look on this photo' (showing me a picture of Miss Street, a face capable of launching a thousand ships) 'and on this!' (showing me one of Lady Jerningham, who with equal ease might have sunk them). 'If you

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will oblige us,' said he, 'with the formality of a quick autopsy, I think we can at once proceed to an arrest.'

"'An open-and-shut case, I imagine?'

"'In the bag! We've not yet found out where he procured the chocolates. But that's a minor question.'

"'And one very easily solved,' I observed. 'Here is the manufacturer's name on the box. This firm sells its products only in its own expensive shops, one of which is in Bond Street and the other, I believe, in Hanover Square.'

"'The box presents no problem,' said he, with a slight touch of pique in his tone. "It was sold in the Bond Street establishment, at four o'clock last Thursday afternoon, and to a person well known to the manageress as Sir Jervase Jerningham himself. The chocolates are another matter. A representative of the firm has been here to inspect them, and declares that those at present in the box must have been made elsewhere and substituted for the originals. Our men are visiting every chocolate factory in England, and, if necessary, will proceed to the Continent.'

"'An enjoyable trip,' I observed, 'especially at the taxpayer's expense! However, I believe they are wasting their time. In my opinion, Sir Jervase was fully capable of making these chocolates himself, and I don't doubt that he did so.'

"'You scientists are brilliant fellows,' retorted the Commissioner, 'but practical matters are not always your strong point. Believe me, the making of chocolates of this standard, like, in its humbler way, the detection of crime, requires the touch of a professional.'

" 'Amateurs have been known to distinguish themselves in the one field,' said I, with a smile, 'and I happen to know that Sir Jervase was no ordinary amateur in the other. Many years ago I had some slight acquaintance with your suspect, and can possibly assist you with a clue. He was then in very different circumstances. He had not yet succeeded to the title, or used it as a stepping stone to his cynical and mercenary marriage to the unprepossessing relict of a Texas millionaire. He was extremely hard up; I myself was struggling to gain a foothold in my profession; we were both members of a wide circle of similarly circumstanced young men.'

"'And as to the chocolates?' interjected the Commissioner.

"'I am approaching them, if a little circuitously. Jerningham, like a good many young fellows of his sort, prided himself on his discernment as a gourmet and his skill as a cook. What is unfortunately far less common, in his case these pretensions were justified. He was gifted by nature with an extraordinarily sensitive palate; in fact, he possessed the equivalent of what

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music lovers term absolute pitch. As some unfortunate persons can identify every note that contributes to a musical chord, so could Jerningham unerringly distinguish, in pilaff, *cassoulet,* or ragout, not merely the major ingredients but the very minims, so to speak, of herb or spice, and even the demisemiquavers of the salt and pepper involved, as to the quality and freshness of which he was exceedingly hard to please.

"'His taste in wine was no less perceptive; he could not only unhesitatingly give the name and year of any vintage he sampled, but in cases where he had visited the vineyard and was acquainted with the staff, he could frequently identify the peasant who had trodden out the grapes.'

"'Interesting to a wine lover,' said the Commissioner. 'Personally, I prefer a good whiskey. May I ask to what point all this is leading?'

"'I thought I had mentioned, my dear Commissioner, that Jerningham, not content with his *réclame* as a critic, applied his talents equally successfully to the creative side. Poor as he was in those days, he could produce positive symphonies from a few cheap cuts of meat, embellished, of course, with the most exquisitely balanced flavoring agents. It was said that at his table one ate always too much, yet never enough, and newcomers were warned to leave room for the dessert.'

"'His confectionery was, if anything, more deliciously subtle than his other dishes, and to him the making of presentable chocolates would be the merest child's play. You may be sure he could easily disguise the flavor of whatever fatal ingredient he may have chosen to employ, and would, indeed, consider himself to be lacking in taste, as well as in discretion, if he neglected to do so. This he could only do if he made the chocolates himself. Moreover, if he stooped so low, artistically, as to introduce crude poisons into the centers of chocolates already manufactured, he would have had no need to find substitutes for those originally in the box.'

"'Well, whether he made them or not, he certainly gave them to her. The woman is dead; the man must hang, and since he is such a connoisseur, we'll try to secure a worthy chef to prepare his last breakfast. Meanwhile, Sir Barnard, perhaps you will be good enough to determine, in your very different but equally precise manner, exactly what little extra filip he has added to his latest recipe. And, since we are using musical similes today, the organs are awaiting you in the morgue.'

"The Commissioner's tone indicated that our interview was at an end. I withdrew. In less than twenty-four hours I was once more seated at his desk. He was in the best of spirits, and permitted himself to

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rub his hands. 'Well, Sir Barnard, what's the good word? Arsenic? Cyanide? Prussic acid?'

"'I have found no trace, Commissioner, of any of those.'

"'No, indeed? Something a little recherché, perhaps. After all, the man is a gourmet. A product of the gorgeous East? A little present from up the Amazon?'

"'Commissioner, you are getting no warmer.'

"'Tiger whiskers, finely chopped?'

"'No.'

"'Then what?'

"'I have found no traces of any poison whatever.'

"'But the woman's dead.'

"'Definitely.'

"'And she ate the chocolates.'

"'No doubt about that.'

"'Aha! I have it! The chocolates were a blind. He did the deed with a sauce Tartare, a béarnaise, some foreign kickshaw of that description.'

"'There was no indication of poison of any sort, introduced by the chocolates or anything else, in the intestines of the late Lady Jerningham. I am, accordingly, returning them to the morgue.'

"'No poison? You must have missed it.'

"I smiled.

"'It's all very well to smile, Sir Barnard. We're none of us getting any younger. Maybe there are new poisons in these days. Atomic stuff —something of that sort. Pardon the bluntness of an old soldier, but I can't help thinking this may be a case for a younger man.'

"To restore his confidence, I infused a contemporary note into my reply. 'I assure you, Commissioner, when it comes to poisons I am hep.'

"'When it comes to murder, so am I. I maintain this woman was murdered. I don't want to impugn your judgment, Sir Barnard, but if you are so sure these chocolates are innocuous, I should uncommonly like to see you eat one.'

"My reputation was at stake. I reached for the box. I took a chocolate; I looked it over; I took a nibble. I must admit I savored the sweetmeat with great deliberation; Sir Jervase's accomplishments, both old and new, were such as to inspire respect. I encountered, as I expected, no bitterness, no burning of the tongue, no taste of almonds. On the other hand, there was unquestionably a novel flavor, almost impossible to describe—faint, elusive, provocative, alluring . . .

"The Commissioner meanwhile was watching me keenly. 'Feeling all right, Sir Barnard?'

"'Extremely well, thank you.' And I casually helped myself to another chocolate.

"'Is that so? Well, as an old Army man, I never ask a fellow to do anything I'm not prepared to do myself.' With that, he took up one of the chocolates, eyed it for a moment, then nibbled, slowly at first, then with mounting interest

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and speed. He reached for another. So did I.

"'Rum flavor,' said the Commissioner thoughtfully.

"'I detect no taste of rum.'

"'I meant strange.'

"'Oh, quite.'

"By now, we were on our fifth and sixth, respectively. Silence, broken only by faint sounds of mastication, fell upon the austere, official room, its tall windows overlooking the Thames. At length, our eyes met.

"'I see it all now.'

"'It's reasonably clear, Commissioner.'

"'The wretched woman couldn't stop eating them.'

"'Exactly. Would you mind pushing the box a little this way?'

"'*I* could stop if I wanted to.'

"'Could you?'

"'Well . . . I'll just have one more.'

"'So will I.'

"'But we're eating the evidence, man, we're eating the evidence!"

"'If we *could* stop, it would be evidence of the possibility of stopping. That would hardly sit well with a jury.'

"'So that fellow's going to get away with it!'

"'I see little chance of a successful prosecution.'

"'Hmm!' And the Commissioner took two at once. I raised an eyebrow. He flushed. 'It makes us even.'

"Once more silence fell upon the austere, official room. It was some time before the Commissioner spoke again. 'I say, Sir Barnard, have you acute abdominal discomfort?'

"'Decidedly. Nausea, too.'

"'A touch of dizziness, I expect?'

"'And spots before the eyes. I'm rather glad there are not too many of these chocolates left. It's probably as well that Lady Jerningham consumed ten pounds before she was overcome. I'm grateful to you, in a way, for sharing the burden with me. We shall probably escape convulsions, syncope, coma, and death. Really, this flavor is altogether *too* intriguing!'

"Little more was said. We finished the few remaining chocolates, sighed with mingled relief and regret, and hastened to our doctors, and, later to our respective spas. Sir Jervase married Miss Street, and seems likely to live happily ever after."

Sir Barnard paused, sipped again at his liver salts, and looked brightly around. "Well, gentlemen, let me have your verdict. Do you consider this case deserves the title of 'the perfect murder'?"

There was rather a long interval of pipe-sucking and pondering.

"It's a murder all right," observed the nonentity amiably.

"I suppose it's a matter of taste," said the celebrated mycologist. "The chocolates fulfilled their function. But, frankly, I feel there is some-

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thing more natural—more woodsy, to use an American expression—about a well-known chosen fungus."

"Would it not have been rather nearer perfection," asked the eminent psychiatrist, "if Sir Jervase, instead of combining merely material ingredients, had achieved his compulsive effect by mental suggestion, hypnotic or otherwise? It would surely have lifted the whole affair to a higher plane."

"A successful murder, most emphatically," said the famous explorer. "Nevertheless, the chocolates did, in part at least, remain in existence after their purpose was accomplished. Even granting that their discovery led inevitably to their elimination, a subtle touch I by no means underrate, this seems to me a fault of style. How much better to have employed, for example, a giant ice-cream sundae, the residue of which would have melted away before suspicion was aroused, and in a manner reminiscent of the polar poniard, or ice dagger!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **QUENTIN REYNOLDS**

TITLE: ***The Bluebeard Murderer***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Baron von Genthner

LOCALE: Berlin, Germany

TIME: In the 1930s

COMMENTS: *The Bluebeard Murderer, "a fiend in human form," had strangled to death seven young women in the past month. They seemed such senseless murders—without rhyme or reason.*

AS WE SAT DOWN TO DINNER SOMEone jokingly remarked, "But there are thirteen of us. How awful!"

"Baron von Genthner phoned to say he'll be a bit late," I told them. "But he'll be here soon and that will make fourteen."

"I hope," Sefton Doames sighed, "that he has some news of that Bluebeard Murderer—as I have so aptly named him."

"You mean 'fiend in human form' who is ravaging Bavaria," I said.

"You wouldn't laugh if your paper were playing the story up as mine is," Doames grumbled. "It was my own fault, I suppose, for calling him the Bluebeard Murderer. It develops that there have been some eighty or so other Bluebeard Murderers in the last hundred years and my paper has been running a series on them. That's why they are so interested in his capture."

"How can you look at this beautiful table and even mention anything about murderers?" The Nightingale sighed.

So we sat down, thirteen of us, and when I looked around I couldn't help but feel proud. It was, for Berlin, a rather notable gathering, but of course, most notable of all was The Nightingale. Her first full-length starring picture was to open

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in Berlin the following night and this dinner was in the nature of an anticipatory congratulation.

Franz Woolwerth, director of the picture, was present, looking like a chubby and very amiable bear cub. You'd never know that he was probably the greatest film director living. There was Walter Duran, the brilliant Moscow correspondent, just out of Russia, and of course Hubert Nicholas, who traveled all over Europe for an American newspaper syndicate. There was Margaret Cane, the beautiful and gifted English girl who wrote novels with one hand and newspaper features with the other. There was the exuberant Ernst Hanfstaengl.

There were others, too, but first and foremost there was The Nightingale. It was her night and she sat there at the head of my table and, young as she was, she dominated that table as the sun dominates the early dawn. Brilliant, beautiful, mysterious—none of us really knew The Nightingale. She spoke perfect German and beautiful French and her Spanish was good and she spoke very cute English. She had emerged from nowhere a few months before, a discovery of Woolwerth's, and who she was or what her nationality was apparently only Woolwerth knew; and he wouldn't tell.

"She is a voice," he would say, "not a person."

I knew The Nightingale as well as anyone did but she had told me no more. It was hard to take one's eyes away from her. I caught hers and saw a reproach in them. At the moment it puzzled me.

Our first course was Aalsuppe, which is eel soup, and laced with claret it was delicious. With it I served vodka which Duran had brought in from Moscow—vodka in small individual carafes which were imbedded in ice. After that we had baked rolled salmon in which oysters cut finely and spiced with pepper, salt, nutmeg, and parsley were hidden. Margaret Cane raised her eyebrows at this dish. It was strictly an English way of preparing salmon. Once after a particularly dull meal at my place she had reproachfully sent me a cookbook called, aptly enough, *Good Things in England*. From that I had taught my cook how to prepare the rolled salmon. With the salmon, need I add, we drank Rudesheimer, 1923.

"Whatever made von Genthner take that job?" Doames asked. "I can think of no man who seems less like a detective than von Genthner. Yet here he is heading an organization which is a great deal like our own Scotland Yard."

"It is a strictly nonpolitical organization," I told Doames. "It isn't connected with either the secret police or the Berlin police force. It is entirely independent of them. When a crime or a series of crimes is committed outside of Berlin and the local police are making no head-

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way, they may ask for von Genthner's help. He took the job because he has always been more or less interested in the study of criminology."

"If anyone can solve those murders he can," The Nightingale spoke unexpectedly. "He is so brilliant."

"Why, I never realized you knew von Genthner," I said in surprise.

"Well, I . . . I have met him," she faltered, "and of course everyone has heard of von Genthner."

That wasn't true. Not fifty people in Berlin knew that von Genthner was in charge of a special squad of detectives. I gazed a bit coldly at The Nightingale. Always one ran up against a wall of mystery when one tried to get close to her. And yet . . . there were times . . .

The capon livers en brochette were being served when von Genthner made his appearance. Urbane in his white tie and with his monocle seeming as permanent a part of his face as the dueling scar he carried on his cheek, the baron made suave apologies for his lateness.

"You know everyone, von Genthner?" I asked.

"Except the lovely lady of the films." He smiled.

The Nightingale looked up for a moment in sudden panic. Then she dropped her eyes. There was an embarrassed silence around the table for a moment. Knowing von Genthner, I had sense enough to say nothing.

"I mean, of course," he went on as though unconscious of either her frightened look or the silence, "that no one could really know such beauty. The nightingale is a bird you hear about but never really know. I have met The Nightingale many times but each time I feel as though I know her a little bit less . . . But my friend," he turned to me, "I am hungry and thirsty, and I hope that your excellent Martha has saved some soup for me. She had better, or I'll tell your guests that it was I who taught her how to cook it."

He sat down and now it was he who dominated the table. The Nightingale kept looking at him and I sensed an undercurrent beneath their banter. She had never looked so lovely. Most brunettes are highly colored. Her hair was dark, and it was brushed back from a very white face. Her eyes were large and they seemed made for laughter, but she seldom laughed. She may have been twenty-two or thirty-two. She was wearing a very simple black silk dress and she was the only woman present who was wearing not a single jewel. In her hair she wore a gardenia.

I was aroused from my contemplation of her by the voice of Doames: ". . . then you captured him this afternoon?" Doames asked eagerly. "Tell me all the gory details, von Genthner. My paper is hungry for that story."

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"There isn't much to tell. Just that he is captured and that he confessed fully."

"Please," Doames pleaded, "give me the story."

Doames worked for the *London Express* and I knew that he had been playing up the murders which had been occurring lately in Bavaria. They seemed such senseless, useless murders. Seven fairly young girls had been strangled to death by a man. The murders had come at irregular intervals. Without rhyme or reason this madman would appear, sometimes in the midst of a crowd, and grab the throat of some girl and strangle her. Only a miracle had kept him from being captured until now.

For some reason or other von Genthner didn't seem anxious to give any information. But when Doames asked him again, he said "All right." Then he put down his glass and gazed for a moment surprisingly enough at Woolwerth, the director. A curious look passed between them and I thought I saw Woolwerth shake his head almost imperceptibly. But perhaps I imagined it.

"Here's the story, Doames, and then let's forget it," von Genthner began. "As you know, during the past month seven girls have been strangled to death in the region located roughly between Schwanburg and Ansbach. One girl managed to escape from the murderer. This afternoon she happened to be attending a moving picture in Schwanburg when she recognized the man who had tried to murder her. She screamed. He was seized. He was absolutely mad. We could . . . the police could," he corrected himself, "get no clear story from him at all. Evidently he was a lunatic of a particularly peculiar kind. Now and then an impulse seized him and he had to strangle someone.

"The fact that all his victims happened to be girls is apparently a mere coincidence. Further investigation revealed that the poor fellow was a badly shell-shocked war veteran who had lately escaped from the veterans' hospital in Nürnberg. His name was never known even to the hospital authorities. He was put in a cell in the Schwanburg police station and a few moments later the police heard a shot. The man was so obviously insane that the police had neglected to search him. Evidently he had a gun concealed on him. With it he killed himself.

"And that," von Genthner said firmly, "is the last word on what you so quaintly called the Bluebeard Murderer."

"That is rather an anti-climactic story," Doames grumbled. "I'd built this fellow up as a supermurderer of all time and he proves to be nothing but a poor scared devil, a hangover from the war. Without even a name."

As a newspaperman my sym-

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pathies were all with Doames. I felt somehow that von Genthner was holding out a bit.

"Doames, if he won't give you more details we'll have to supply them ourselves," I suggested. "Now here's an angle. Whatever made that poor madman go to that moving picture house in broad daylight? What brought him there? Could it have been the picture that was showing? What was the picture, von Genthner?"

I saw von Genthner stiffen. Once more I saw him look toward Woolwerth and I noticed an almost imperceptible frown on the director's face.

"I have no idea of the picture that was showing," von Genthner said coldly.

"I have a brilliant idea, Doames," I cried. "Why not say that the theater was having a preview of The Nightingale's picture, *Der Traum?* It opens here tomorrow anyhow and in London next week. It will be a magnificent send-off for her in London. Say that the madman had seen The Nightingale before and had conceived such a passion for her that when he saw in the papers that her picture was to appear he risked his very life to see it. It will be gorgeous publicity for her."

Doames arose and his eyes were shining. "My friend, you are too, too wonderful. That makes the story. Nightingale, tomorrow your picture with that story will be on the first page of the *Express* and one million nine hundred and eighty-six readers will see it. They will become Nightingale-conscious. . . ."

He rushed from the room to phone. London correspondents in Berlin always phone their stories to London. It costs less than cabling and it is much easier to evade the censor.

The Nightingale was laughing now and her laugh was just a little less sweet than celestial music and her smile was only a trifle less than a glimpse of heaven.

"How thrilling!" she said.

"What I like about English newspapermen is that they never fake stories," Nicholas said.

Everyone was laughing at the supreme impudence of Doames in thus "faking" this story. Well, there's no harm in faking a story if it doesn't hurt anyone and even Nick, Duran, and I, brought up in the sterner American school which considers "faking" to be very reprehensible, were amused by the exuberant Doames. He soon returned with a broad smile on his face.

"My office is crazy about the story. It is absolutely exclusive, I told them. Beautiful lady, you'll be famous in four hours."

"You darling," she said, but she said it to me. "It was your idea, wasn't it?"

"It was indeed," I told her blithely, "and in return I expect you to love me madly from now on."

"But I always have," she said simply.

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"May I have some more wine?" von Genthner broke in, and I was startled to see how stern he looked. "And for heaven's sake let's forget this silly Bluebeard business."

So we had more wine.

Then someone asked The Nightingale to sing. She seemed reluctant. "After that lovely dinner," she protested, "how could anyone sing?" But we all insisted and she said she'd sing one song.

She sat down and they were quiet. Then she began to play and in a moment I got up and walked out on the balcony. I had a large balcony overlooking the Tiergarten and it was a lovely night, with a moon that was the biggest moon that ever I saw. Her voice drifted across the room inside and filtered through to my balcony.

"Kathleen Mavourneen, the gray dawn is breaking,
The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill. . . ."

A soft breeze was coming from across the street, a breeze which had been dallying with the tulips and the young spring flowers which were just beginning to appear. It was the scene of those flowers, I guess, that made me homesick for a moment.

"The lark from her light wing, the gray dawn is shaking
Kathleen Mavourneen, what, slumb'ring still? . . ."

The moon is mysterious, I told myself, until we realize that it is a dead, lifeless thing. It is glamorous until we know that it borrows its light from the sun . . . Music is like that too . . . Music is a craft, not an art. . . . That girl who is singing that beautiful song. Her voice is merely a trained voice and the feeling I imagine in it is mere technique.

"Oh why art thou so silent, thou voice of my heart,
It may be for years and it may be forever . . ."

Her voice trailed away and I walked back into the room.

"Whatever made you sing that song?" Woolwerth asked, puzzled.

"Why," she said softly, "I like Irish songs . . . A good friend of mine taught me that song. He sang it to me one night."

"Now, how about a little Liszt for a nightcap?" I broke in harshly. "What do you say, Putsey?"

Hanfstaengl was nominally the Press Chief and as such was useful to foreign correspondents. He was always a valuable adjunct to any dinner party too, because he was willing at all times to play or sing in practically any language. He was probably at his best when playing American college songs. I don't think there was one he didn't know. He himself had written a Harvard song when he was an undergraduate there. Yes, he was

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amusing all right—but not when he played Liszt.

He sat down and put his elephantine hands on the keys. I tell you that Hanfstaengl could play Liszt. He played the Piano Concertos in E Flat, and in A. It left us all breathless.

Then suddenly my party was over. They were filing out and saying "Wiedersehn."

The Nightingale said, "Aren't you taking me home?"

"Jerry Young has begged for the privilege," I smiled. "You are lucky. You shall be taken home by the future British Ambassador to Berlin."

So they went—all but von Genthner, and I knew that he wasn't going just yet. I knew that there was something—something important—he wanted to tell me.

"Let's have one brandy on the balcony," I suggested, and then I called Martha.

She brought the bottle and two glasses and we sat on the balcony.

"Now tell me, von Genthner," I turned to him, "what's on your mind?" He looked up, startled.

"Come now, friend," I told him laughingly. "What were those curious looks that passed between you and Woolwerth? Why were you so reluctant to give Doames the details of the capture of that madman in Schwanburg? Why were you so dismayed when I suggested that Doames fake the story and say that the madman was enticed by a showing of her new picture? There were undercurrents passing between you and Woolwerth and The Nightingale. I don't like mysteries, von Genthner. Tell me about it."

"Are you in love with The Nightingale?" he asked suddenly.

I yawned. "Love is a big word for a little guy like me to use. It's too big a word to play with and that's my business—playing with words."

"There are men who will do almost anything for love," he said savagely.

"Sure; some will even marry for it."

"And," he said unexpectedly, "they go mad because of it and they'll murder for it. You're right, of course, I do want to tell you a story."

"I'm listening," I said—and waited.

"You knew, I suppose," he began, "that I originally came from Bavaria. I was born just a few miles outside of Schwanburg on the Danube. After the war I was a bit sick of living and of watching men die, so I went back to my old home and I stayed there studying my music and playing with my science. My two nearest neighbors, old friends of mine, were Anton Leiber and Peter Schultz. Leiber died some fifteen years ago leaving a brilliant young son, a man of twenty-five then, whose name too was Anton Leiber. Peter Schultz, a widower, had a daughter, a daughter

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named Bertha, who was then about eight.

"Eight years ago Anton Leiber was the most brilliant young scientist in Germany—perhaps in the world. He took degrees in medicine and chemistry at Heidelberg and at Goettingen and then, being well off, decided to spend the rest of his life in research work.

"Now perhaps you don't know how closely chemistry and medicine are aligned. Life itself is of course a chemical function. Each cell in the body is a separate little chemical factory which is supported by the salts, the water, the nourishment, and the oxygen which the arterial blood brings to it. When the supply of nourishment is cut off or when such a cell is bruised the result is—pain.

"Leiber had imposed this task upon himself. He would eliminate pain. Such a job, of course, is within the province of a biochemist. People outside of surgery, medicine, and chemistry think that pain has been eliminated. Sir Humphry Davy, Faraday, and the American, John D. Goodman, were the first to introduce the medical world to anesthetics, and later Dr. Crawford Long performed an operation with the help of ether. Ethyl chloride, nitrous oxide, scopolamine, cocaine, and eucaine all followed, but they were mere pain soporifics. You tossed one of these drugs to pain and you said, 'Chew on that a while, my friend,' and while the pain was doing that the cells of the body were free from its ravages. But once pain lost interest in the drug, it returned.

"Practically all drugs take their toll, too; cocaine, for instance, is a powerful cardiac depressant. All drugs merely compromise with pain—they do not kill it. Leiber intended to go beyond all this. He would find a chemical that would absolutely kill pain.

" 'Pain is a useful servant—but a harsh master,' he once told me. 'Pain as a warning signal that something is wrong is excellent—but the trouble with it is that once it has warned us, it insists upon taking possession of us. There is no need for this. I will kill pain—physical and mental pain.'

"Leiber was the most gentle soul I ever met—except when on the subject of his specialty. Then his deep-set eyes blazed and his hands clenched. He talked of pain as though it were an enemy.

"One night he came to see me. This was about eight years ago. His eyes were shining and he was trembling.

" 'I've got it!' he cried. 'I'm on the right track. I'll have the whole answer within a year. My theory holds good for mental pain, too. I've gone beyond Fourneau and his stovaine, beyond the others with their tropacocaine and alypin. They and their drugs merely compromise with pain. I will kill it entirely. If a cell is paining I will kill that cell—

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and, von Genthner, I will replace it with a new cell, a complete, live, healthy new cell. I have done it in animals already. If we can replace one cell, we can replace a thousand or ten thousand cells.'

"'How,' I asked, 'can you segregate such cells and have them ready at all times? How can you keep them alive?'

"'Alexis Carrel kept a chicken heart alive for twenty years,' he rasped. 'He put me on the track. We will kill pain not with temporary stop-gaps, such as drugs, but by surgery, by chemical surgery.'

"He walked up and down my study, his hands clenching and unclenching. His eyes were flashing and his dark hair fell over his forehead.

"'And mental pain?' I asked.

"'The same theory holds no matter what Krafft-Ebing and Freud say,' he shouted. 'Look here, von Genthner. I walk in my garden. I see a snail on the ground. The sight of a snail sickens me, causes me acute mental distress. Should I go to Krafft-Ebing or Freud and let them dig into my mind for months and months to find out why it is that the sight of a snail causes me mental pain? Nonsense,' he snorted. 'Instead I kill the snail. My mental pain dies at the same time.'

"'In short, to eliminate mental pain, or as you say to "kill" mental pain,' I asked, 'you would eliminate or kill that which is the cause of it.'

"'Yes,' he said calmly.

"'I am glad, my friend, that I do not cause you any mental anguish,' I laughed. 'Or to be consistent you would have to eliminate me.'

"'Exactly,' he said softly. 'That of course is where my theory will ultimately lead.'

"I felt a bit uneasy. 'Stick to your biochemistry, Leiber. Your theory there sounds interesting, sounds more than interesting. But leave the mind alone. Leave mental pyrotechnics to the men who specialize in such things. A surgeon's scalpel cannot cut away memory or kill remorse or fear—without killing the mind; and the duty of a medical man, even a biochemist, is to build and cure, not to kill . . . Leiber,' I looked at him closely, 'you've been working too hard. Take a rest. Go on a walking tour. Climb a mountain. The Danube is a hundred feet away. Get into a boat and paddle for a week. But rest a while.'

"'I have no time for rest,' he said sharply. 'And there is another thing I wanted to ask you—about Bertha Schultz.'

"'What has she to do with biochemistry?' I laughed.

"'Everything,' he said. 'Von Genthner, I am in love with her. I want to marry her. I want you to talk to her father—he is a good friend of yours, I know. Convince him that I am not a lovesick fool, von Genthner. Convince him that I love his daughter tenderly, devotedly.'

"I got up and I am sure my face

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must have expressed my utter amazement. 'Little Bertha? My Lord, Leiber, she is a child. She is only sixteen,' I gasped.

"'But older than her years,' he said. 'Have you ever heard her sing? Of course you have. Yes, it was you who taught her to love music. A month ago I was passing her home and I heard her singing. Until then she had been merely a child to me, too, a neighbor's child. But that voice, von Genthner, entered my heart and my soul and my brain. That voice possessed me; it was as though a thousand skylarks had made their nests in my brain. I can hear nothing else. And I love her, von Genthner.'

"'You are what? Thirty-five? she is sixteen. To her you must seem a middle-aged man. Wait, Leiber. Wait two years.'

"'I cannot wait,' he interrupted, 'I need her.'

"'You, one of the world's great scientists, need that sixteen-year-old girl? Come now, Leiber, just because she sings prettily, you think you're in love with her. You're in love with her voice—'

"'That voice has come between me and my work,' he shouted. 'Can't you understand? For a thousand years the world has been waiting for my discovery. Now I am on the verge of revealing it and at the critical point the voice of this girl has taken possession of me. When she is not around I find myself listening for her voice. My work is suffering—and my work must not suffer.'

"He left. I sat up half the night thinking. Then I made up my mind.

"I hurried to see Peter Schultz the next morning. Frankly, I was frightened. Why, I don't know. I told Peter the whole story. Of late years he had been feeble and had leaned on me much, especially in the upbringing of the child.

"'Leiber,' I told him, 'is brilliant. He may well be the world's most brilliant man. But, friend, I do not think that he is for our Bertha.'

"'Nor do I,' Peter said.

"'The man is close to a nervous breakdown—or worse,' I said.

"I nodded and he knew what I meant. 'I suggest that we send Bertha to Berlin. She shall stay with my sister there; and, Peter, it is time that we really recognized her talent. She has a remarkable voice. Let me have it trained by the masters in Berlin. Let us send her to Berlin tomorrow.'

"He nodded and we called in Bertha. She was a lovely child, slim and, through the heritage of an English mother, dark, and her eyes were very large and very dark too. They lit up when she saw me. Always I had enjoyed the status of a favorite uncle with the child. I had introduced her to music, had myself taught her French and English. She was overjoyed at the prospect of going to Berlin. And so we sent her.

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"A week after she had gone Leiber stormed in to see me. He was in a dreadful state. He looked as though he hadn't slept for weeks and his eyes were the eyes of a hunted wolf.

"'They have taken Bertha away,' he cried. 'Where is she? You know where she is. I will find her, von Genthner, if I have to go to the ends of the earth. Can't you see how I love that girl? Am I leprous that you forbid me to see her? Am I immoral? Am I tainted? You have told me that I will one day take my place in the first ranks of science. Why am I unworthy of that girl?'

"'Steady, steady, Leiber,' I soothed. 'Wait, wait another year or so. We have no objection to you. But she is a child. She will be a woman soon enough. Then she can listen to your pleading.'

"'I cannot wait,' he said. 'Her voice haunts me. It hurts me except when I can hear it. Her voice is in my consciousness. I must get it out of my brain. It causes me mental pain . . .'

"Suddenly his eyes opened wide but he looked ahead blankly, not seeing me at all and he whispered, 'All pain must be killed. To kill pain you must eliminate the cause of the pain. Pain must be killed . . . her voice causes me pain . . . I must—

"'Leiber, Leiber!" I said 'Steady!'

"'Pain must be iklled," he repeated in the tone of a man walking in his sleep. Without another word he rose and walked out into the night. And I knew now that what I had suspected was true. He was mad, quite mad.

"The next day his servants called and asked if I had seen him. He hadn't reached home and they were worried. We made a thorough search of the surrounding countryside but could find no trace of him. Three weeks later he turned up. He was walking along a street in Ingolstadt when, without warning, he seized a young girl by the throat, crying, 'Pain must be killed. I will kill your voice. I will kill your voice . . .'

"Luckily there were strong men in the crowd and they grabbed him. He was hopelessly insane now and was immediately confined to an asylum.

"Meanwhile what of Bertha? Her teachers in Berlin were delighted at her progress. 'She can be a great actress,' they told me. 'She can be a superb singer. Send her to Rheinhardt. Send her to Bellini in Milan. We have taught her all that we know.'

"Bertha in three years had grown up. Now she was tall and slim and her eyes were even larger, but to me she was still a child. Her father had died and had made me her guardian. And day and night I was tortured by one thought, one fear. What if Leiber should escape? In one of his rational moments he would be clever enough to escape from any asylum.

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"I came to a sudden resolution. Leiber would never destroy Bertha. I myself would. I would kill Bertha and replace her with a totally different personality. Bertha should die and a glamorous, mysterious being take her place, with no resemblance to the child Leiber knew.

"I told Bertha my plans. 'I want you to study abroad for two years. You say you would rather sing and act in films than study either opera or concert work. Very well. For two years I want you to disappear completely from Germany. For two years you are not even to speak German or think it. You are to drop the name of Bertha Schultz now. Never are you to tell anyone who you are or from where you came.'

"'It seems so silly,' she laughed. 'But of course I will do what you say.'

"'Child, it isn't silly,' and she now realized how much in earnest I was. 'I have a definite reason for this. It is an important reason. I ask you to do this—the first favor I have ever asked you.'

"She was worried now. 'Of course,' she said slowly. 'Bertha Schultz dies tonight. Until you give me permission I shall never reveal to anyone who I am or from where I came.'

"'You shall be mysterious,' I told her. 'For two years you shall not even see me or write to me. You shall have all the money you want. Your whole time shall be spent in study. But you are to form an entirely new personality. You are to take a new name. My child, I want you to be a voice, not a person. You shall be like a bird in the forest, heard but not seen . . . A rare bird with a beautiful voice . . . a bird so rare that none may know it.'

"'Like . . . like a nightingale,' she laughed. 'It is such a pretty word, too. In French and even in English it is a pretty word. I shall be. . . .'"

"Von Genthner, von Genthner," I cried, leaping up and grasping his arm, "then The Nightingale and Bertha Schultz are one and the same. That is why she is so mysterious, why she has built a wall around herself. That is why—"

"Of course," von Genthner said, "have you only guessed it now?"

"Does she know . . . about Leiber?" I asked.

"If you mention Anton Leiber to her he would be a mere name out of her childhood. No, she doesn't know why I have made her create a new personality. Knowing me, she trusted me. She knew that I had some good reason for it. Now let me finish the story, though the rest of it must be obvious to you.

"Bertha, or The Nightingale as I shall call her from now on, studied faithfully during the two years she was away. Seven months ago I brought her back and turned her over to Woolwerth—in my opinion the only real genius the talking pictures have yet produced. I told him

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the whole story and his sense of the dramatic made him fall in with my idea of making a mysterious creature of our Nightingale.

" 'Just a voice,' he said. 'Not even a name. Not even a person. Merely a voice.'

"He gave her comparatively small bits in two pictures and, as you know, she was sensational. She remained virtually a recluse. She attended but one social function—a dinner Woolwerth gave. I wasn't there. You were. In fact," von Genthner added dryly, "I made up the guest list and had you included.

"It was a month ago that the first of the so-called Bluebeard Murders occurred. When this murderer's victims had reached the number of five, I was asked to take charge. The first thing I did, just as a matter of routine, was to ask for pictures of the dead girls.

"I took one look at them and my heart turned to ice. Each girl was slim and dark and each bore a faint but nonetheless unmistakable resemblance to The Nightingale. I phoned the insane asylum and my worst fears were justified. Leiber had escaped three weeks previously!

"This threw me into action. Unknown to The Nightingale I put a heavy police guard around her. Twice more the madman struck and each time he got away; a third whom he had attacked miraculously recovered. All the murders occurred in the region of Schwanburg. We tried everything but no trap worked. Then I conceived a desperate plan.

"I received Woolwerth's cooperation. There is one large picture theater in Schwanburg, the Ufa Palazt. I planned for a showing of The Nightingale's new picture for that theater. During the past week we advertised in every newspaper in the region. Each day we ran a large picture of, not The Nightingale, but of Bertha Schultz as she was eight years ago, on the first page.

"Thousands and thousands of these papers and additional posters were printed and distributed everywhere. They were posted on trees and on barns and on fences. You couldn't walk fifty yards in the vicinity of Schwanburg without seeing a picture of Bertha Schultz with the announcement that she would appear in person at the preview of her new picture which would be shown for just one performance at the Ufa Palazt. If Anton Leiber was in the vicinity he must see that picture. Would it draw him to the theater? I had staked everything on that. I had even revealed The Nightingale's true name. If this plan failed she would be in double danger henceforth.

"I stood outside the theater with the one girl who had escaped from him. Of course it was a fifty-to-one chance that he would appear, but I had to take that chance. He did ap-

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pear and even before the girl with me gave a frightened cry I recognized him.

"We closed in on him. He came quietly enough, not recognizing me at all. At the police station he gave only vague, disconnected replies to our questions. Then suddenly, as though a film had been removed from his eyes, he stared at me and cried, 'von Genthner, what are you doing here? What am I doing here?'

"'You are here because you have murdered seven girls trying to drown out the sound of a voice which rings in your mind,' I said.

"'Yes, yes,' he answered, 'a voice rings in my mind. Sometimes it gets very, very loud; and then . . . then things are confused. I hear it now . . . I feel that it is going to get louder . . .'

"'You can't still the sound of that voice. Only death can do that,' I told him. 'While you live you shall hear it and be tortured by it and, worse still, inflict pain on others. As long as you live you shall try to kill that voice by killing those who remind you of it.'

"'No . . . no . . .' he cried. "It is better that I die.'

"'Only then will the pain leave you,' I said sternly.

"He looked at me quietly and in his eyes I could see the beginning of a struggle. His lucid moment would soon be over, though now he was trying desperately and consciously to prolong it. 'Quickly,' he pleaded, 'let me be alone and give me something to make me sleep.'

"I looked into his eyes and for the moment they were clear and there was a message in them that I was able to read.

"'Put him into a cell,' I told the police.

"We walked to a cell. I went in first. Then he followed. I told the police not to enter. Then I walked out.

"'Leave him alone,' I told the police. 'I have given him something which will make him sleep.'

"A moment later we heard a shot and we ran back. Leiber had sent a bullet into his poor, mad brain.

"'But,' the police chief protested, 'I searched him thoroughly. I found no weapon on him.'

"I looked at the police chief. 'No, it was I who searched him. I myself. And I found no gun on him. So the responsibility is entirely mine.'

"The police chief saluted. 'As you say, Herr Baron.'

I stood up and reached for von Genthner's hand. "Then he is dead and she will never again be in danger?"

"That is true. So you see why it was I didn't care to discuss the murders at dinner. You see why I felt dismayed when you all unwittingly stumbled on part of the truth. It is a story that we had all better forget. It has caused enough torture, especially to The Nightingale."

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"But she knows nothing of it. Why should it have tortured her?"

Von Genthner rose. He looked very angry. "You fool," he rasped. "Don't you realize the torture she had been through? You yourself have been full of suspicions of all kinds. Who was she? Where did she come from? You asked her these questions—you of little faith. She couldn't answer because of her promise to me. And she knew how you felt and, being a woman now and not a child, your pain was her pain—"

"Has she told you this? How do you know, von Genthner?" I grabbed his arm impatiently.

"What a beautiful dawn," he said softly. "Look at the sun rise over those poplars. I tell you our Tiergarten is the most beautiful park in the world. And do you know that flowers smell more fragrant in the dawn? I have a theory—"

"Von Genthner," I cried. "Tell me. How do you know she cared whether I was in agony with my suspicions?"

"Because I am not a fool," he said. "I have eyes that see and ears that hear. And tonight I heard her sing an Irish song. And as she sang it there were tears in her eyes. Now she has never been to Ireland and so it must have been an Irishman who taught her that song. I have not spent a hundred nights in your company without hearing you sing or hum Kathleen Mavourneen dozens of times. So I knew it was you who taught it to her . . ."

"And so. . . .?" I asked softly.

"And so, my friend," he yawned, "it is time that an old man went to bed. But you are young . . . and she is young, too, and I think that if you phoned her now she would not mind it. I am sure that she is still awake. For I told her to remain awake until she heard from me."

But I wasn't listening. I was giving her number into the phone to a very sleepy telephone operator.

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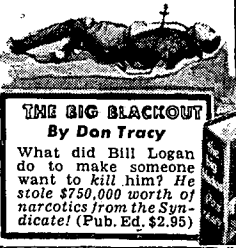

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